

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR FRANCIS TERRY MCNAMARA

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Terry, I wonder if you could start off by telling me when and where you were born and a little about your family background and education, so we'll know who you are.

MCNAMARA: I was born in Troy, New York, November 2, 1927, of an Irish-American family. Troy, New York, is a small, industrial town in upstate New York, just north of Albany, the capital of New York State. I had a happy, easy childhood, in a large, extended family, both maternal and paternal sides. I was taken under the wing of my maternal grandmother and grandfather, to a great extent. The first son was taken under the wing of the paternal side, and I, as the second son, was taken under the wing of the maternal side. They were really marvelous people, both immigrants from Ireland. It was a warm, happy atmosphere, and a marvelous atmosphere for a child to grow up in. Three generations living together, interacting. I have seven brothers; I'm the eighth boy, no sisters.

My father died when he was about 41 or 42 years old. By this time, I'd been in the Navy. I ran away and joined the Navy when I was a young boy, during World War II.

I should go back, I suppose, through school. I went to a Catholic parochial school. I then went to a Catholic boys' military school, called La Salle, and didn't like it. Got myself out of it and went to a regular public high school for one year.

And then got myself into the Navy and went off at the tail end of World War II. Ultimately went to submarine school and was in the submarine service at the end of the war. Was discharged when I was 18 years old, after having been in the Navy for about two years, and was therefore a veteran.

I then took a special college entrance exam for veterans, passed it, and was admitted to college with my high school mates, who had stayed at home. And so I never missed a beat.

I didn't formally graduate from high school, although they gave me a high school diploma. But it was more a formality than anything else. So I only went to high school for a full two years, and missed some of the things that most kids have. I didn't have any of the social side of high school that was such a big thing in my day in America. Also, I missed a lot of things like advanced math and science which I've always regretted.

But, nonetheless, I don't regret having gone in the Navy. I think it was a good thing for me, and I'm glad I did it. I would have wasted my time in high school.

Q: Where'd you go to college?

MCNAMARA: I started at Syracuse and had some problems with the sheriff.

I was the president of my dormitory, and at the end of the year, we had a party to celebrate the end of the year. I organized the party and we made arrangements for the manager of a little restaurant not too far from our dorm to cater the party. Part of the arrangement was that he would provide the beer, and we would buy whiskey together. Most of the boys wanted beer, as they didn't drink whiskey, but there were a few who did. So he was going to buy a case of whiskey, and we were going to pay for a couple of bottles, and the rest of it was his.

Anyway, he got us into a crap game while we were making the arrangements. And I don't know anything about gambling; I'm not a gambler and I really know nothing about it, but two of my friends, my committee members who were organizing the party, said that he was cheating us. I don't know, but they were convinced that he was, and they convinced me that he had cheated us. So we were in a bad frame of mind in terms of our relationship with him. We were pissed off, you might say.

The night of the party came, and this guy was out some place or other, drinking, and hadn't come back. The meal was prepared by his staff. We ate, but there was no beer. And the boys, most of whom wanted to drink beer, were very unhappy. We found the case of whiskey, and so I said, "Well, drink the whiskey." So they drank the whiskey, finishing the whole case.

The owner came back, drunk, and found that his whiskey had disappeared. I was very angry with him, in any case, because he hadn't come back with the beer, and so we got into an argument. He accused some of the boys of stealing his whiskey. I told my constituents to pack everything up and leave. We'd already had dinner, and we'd finished the whiskey, and so I said, "Get the beer and come." In the meantime, I told him what I thought of him, and he got very angry and ordered us out of the restaurant. So we all left.

But we had never paid him. I gave the money back to the boys, and we all went home for our summer vacation.

After he sobered up the restaurant owner got onto the sheriff and was going to have me put in jail or something. And so I decided not to go back to Syracuse.

Some friends of mine told me about a girls' college in Troy that was accepting veterans, called Russell Sage College. I went there and applied for entry. They let me in, and so I went to a girls' college for the next two years. The summer between my junior and senior year (I was working as a singing waiter in an Italian restaurant in the Catskills), the Korean War broke out. I was bored with school.

Q: The Korean War, June of 1950. That was my war.

MCNAMARA: As a member of the naval reserve I thought, "What the hell, they'll have to give veterans another GI Bill." My GI Bill from World War II was running out, so I figured, "I'm in the submarine reserve, I'll go off to the submarine base at New London, Connecticut, for six months to one year. Then I can return to college with adequate GI Bill eligibility to finish my degree."

Q: Torpedoing many North Korean ships.

MCNAMARA: The North Koreans had no navy.

So, anyway, I volunteered for active duty and thought I was going to go off to New London.

I went to Albany, where the naval reserve recruiting station was located. I took a physical. They sent me to Brooklyn that night, without a uniform.

When I got to the Brooklyn Navy Yard I was given uniforms. In less than a week, I was on an airplane for California.

When I got to California, they didn't know quite what to do with me there, so they put me on another airplane and sent me to Japan.

I arrived in Japan with the first group of reservists to arrive in the Far East. We were supposed to fill out the crews of the various ships that were going into combat off North Korea.

The first night, they put us in an old Japanese barracks at the Yokosuka Naval Base.

While there, we were restricted to the Navy Base. That evening, after a few drinks at the Navy Club, we jumped over the wall to go in and find out what a geisha house was like. We found it very interesting.

Q: Oh, having occupied Japan about the same time, it was an eye-opener for the American youth.

MCNAMARA: Oh, fascinating. It was fascinating. And what the hell could they do to us, whether they caught us or not?

The first Marines had been wounded and were coming back from combat in Korea, and they were there at the naval hospital. They were jumping over the wall, too. I remember hoisting a Marine, in a heavy cast up to the hip, over the wall, so that we could all get over to the geisha house. There wasn't anything they could do to us. What were they going to do—send us to Korea? We were already on our way. And the Marines had already been wounded there, so they weren't going to do anything to them.

After a few days in Yokosuka we were put on a train to Sasebo, which is a major port in Kyushu, the southern island of Japan.

Marvelous trip on the train, in the middle of the summer of 1950. In the coaches, the seats were small and very uncomfortable. It took three days. The train had coal-fired steam engines. There was a series of tunnels that you go through, all the way along Japan's Inland Sea. Jesus, every time we'd go through a tunnel, the whole coach that we were in, which was sweltering hot, would fill up with fumes. We were black with soot in no time.

As we went along the Inland Sea, we stopped frequently at all the towns on the way. It was a marvelous trip seeing Japan that way, before it became so terribly modernized.

On the second day, we came upon a poor Japanese farmer who was trying to cross the tracks with a "honey cart." A honey cart is full of...

Q: Liquid manure.

MCNAMARA: Human manure, in buckets, on a wheeled cart. He was trying to pull it across the tracks and didn't quite make it. The train hit the honey cart, and the shit went all over the locomotive. It baked on the hot engine. The stench was incredible. We couldn't get back on the train until they washed it.

Ultimately, we arrived in Sasebo after three days on the train. We were all very tired as we had to sit up, no place to lie down or anything of that sort. The naval authorities at Sasebo had no idea what to do with us. The first night, we slept exhausted on the lawn in front of the administration building. The next morning, they put us on ships in the harbor to sleep.

Incredulously, I awoke on the ship that I was on, steaming along in the middle of the China Sea. It left port while I was sleeping, and we were off the Korean coast before I knew what the hell was going on.

It wasn't any big deal. It was a replenishment ship. After bringing supplies to the combat ships we returned to Sasebo where I was able to disembark.

Then, they sent me down to Taiwan, to join the St. Paul, which was a heavy cruiser. The St. Paul was there to protect Taiwan from the possibility of an invasion by the Chinese Communist. How the Chinese Communists were ever supposed to mount such an invasion still seems a mystery. The Straits of Formosa are wide and often storm tossed. Moreover, the Communists had little in the way of effective naval forces.

Well, Taiwan was really in bad shape when we arrived. The Nationalist Chinese had come over the year before, in 1949, from the mainland, after losing the civil war. And there they were, a ragtag gang, many of the soldiers didn't even have shoes.

The Taiwanese had revolted against the mainland Chinese in 1948. When we arrived there was still tension. The Nationalists Chinese were feeling doubly insecure. They had just lost the war on the mainland. At the same time, the Taiwanese revolt was only recently put down. We poor sailors did not understand fully the causes of the evident tensions among the Chinese. Indeed, we were often puzzled by their nervousness and harsh attitudes towards civilians.

We mainly sat in the harbor of Keelung, on the northern coast of Taiwan.

Every third night, we were able to go into town on liberty. The Chinese authorities had opened up official whorehouses for the American sailors. The local officials collected the money. American Navy pharmacist's mates were stationed at the door, handing out pro kits. After you did your thing with a lady, you were forced to use a prophylactic.

Q: Things. It was known as the clap shack.

MCNAMARA: Oh, it was something like that. It was just at the door of the whorehouse. They had a couple of hefty shore patrolmen there to enforce the edict that you had to take one. If you wanted to get laid, you had to go through this awful ritual afterward. Pretty unaesthetic.

After a few weeks in Taiwan almost everyone on the ship got sick with diarrhea. I was one of the rare exceptions. It was dreadful. Guys were crapping in their beds. Somehow or other I didn't get sick I don't know why. I went ashore at every opportunity. Often the guys who didn't go ashore were the ones who were most affected. I ate everything, drank everything, and never got sick.

Eventually, they had to pull the ship out of Taiwan. As a relief, we were sent to Korea, to the war. We went all the way north, along the shore, bombarding, almost to Siberia. Indeed, we were not far from the Russian navy base at Vladivostok.

Then suddenly, the Chinese came into the war. This was in the early winter of '50, November, December. The Marines had gotten all the way to the Manchurian border. When they encountered the Chinese they were forced to withdraw. We evacuated them through the port of Hungnam. An armada of ships was brought in to cover their retreat with naval gun fire. The heavy 8" guns of the Saint Paul cast us as a principal participant.

Indeed, we were the last ship to leave port. I remember it was very cold, and we didn't have proper winter clothing on the ship. The ship had been anchored, firing into the hills above the town. As we were getting underway, I took the flag down at the stern. From this vantage point I watched explosions destroy the port facilities. As dusk descended, the whole waterfront lit up like 4th of July. The spectacle made me forget for a time that my hands were freezing and I had no winter gloves.

After a rest in Sasebo, we were sent to the east coast to support an offensive. We crept into the port of Inchon in the middle of the night. As the mist lifted in the morning, we began to bombard the North Koreans, who were then in Inchon and Seoul. We got behind them. The troops were coming up from the south, and we had gotten well up into the estuary.

Q: The Han River estuary.

MCNAMARA: Yes the Han River estuary. Inchon is the port at the top of the estuary. We got into the Inchon port before they really knew we were there, and started bombarding. As we fired into their rear, American troops attacked from the south. The Chinese and the few North Koreans that were still fighting, were caught by surprise. That was the beginning of the rout of the Chinese. They retreated in great disorder. The Americans, and other allied troops, chased them, and probably could have chased them all the way to China if the advance had not been stopped by offers to negotiate. President Truman was under pressure to stop the fighting and to start peace talks once our troops got past the 38th parallel. In retrospect, a great mistake. It gave the Chinese a respite during which they were able to regroup and consolidate defensive positions. The war then went on for another two or three years. These guys obviously weren't really ready to talk in terms of a reasonable settlement, they just wanted to relieve the pressure.

After spending the winter and spring off Korea, my ship was released and returned to California. I got off and was put on inactive duty in September of '51, after having served a little over a year.

Hitchhiking across the country, I arrived home in October. It was too late to enroll in college. A pal of mine wanted me to go to the University of California. I had seen Berkeley while I was in California and liked it. I decided that I would transfer there to complete my degree. Shortly after returning to Troy I went to see the dean at Russell Sage, a very nice lady, to ask her to send my transcripts to California. To my surprise, she said, "Why do you want to do that? You will lose a year," she warned. She then promised that I would graduate the next year, if I stayed at Russell Sage. "Stay here," she urged, "don't be foolish." Obviously, she was giving me good advice. I was soon convinced that I should stay in Troy for the next year. I could then use my newly gained GI Bill to begin graduate study.

While waiting for the next semester, I took a job on a tugboat. I had worked on tugboats when I was 15 and 16 years old, on the Hudson River, New York harbor, the Erie Barge Canal and the Great Lakes. The pay was good and I enjoyed a sailor's life.

School began in January, 1952. I spent the semester re-emersing in the peculiar atmosphere of a virtually all girl school. By this time, almost all of the post-war male students were gone. Only a handful of men were left. I was the only veteran amongst them.

The next summer I went to sea again, the summer of '52. This time, I sailed to Germany, Holland and France. The highlight of my travels that summer was a long stay in France at the marvelous picturesque port of Bordeaux. In September I was back in school finishing my degree. I applied to several graduate schools, Yale and McGill both accepted me, but I couldn't start until the following September. It was back to sea again until I could enter graduate school. The highlight of traveling was a trip to the Canadian arctic where we visited Eskimo villages, saw polar bears and broke through sea ice to enter Frobisher Bay.

Q: Where'd you go to graduate school?

MCNAMARA: McGill, in Montreal.

Q: What were you majoring in?

MCNAMARA: History. I went to McGill, and I was there for a year. I loved Montreal. McGill was quaint as a relic of British colonialism. Nonetheless, it was demanding academically. This was a new experience for me. Once I had gotten on to it, Russell Sage posed no challenge intellectually. McGill imposed a rigor that forced me to work hard and to learn how to study and to write.

The next year I won a New York State scholarship. Scholarships were awarded on the basis of the results of special examination. The scholarships, however, could not be used outside New York State. My GI Bill was almost exhausted for the second time. Moreover, I decided to marry.

Sadly, I left Montreal to enroll at Syracuse University. At the same time, I took a job with the State Bank of Albany, chasing bad debtors. This was a soul-destroying experience. I've been turned off debt ever since. I really can't borrow money. I have no charge accounts, even to this day. Working for the bank, I saw poor devils losing everything, being manipulated by a system of easy consumer credit. A particularly distasteful part of my job was to repossess cars, televisions, all sorts of things that had been financed by the bank.

After a year, I couldn't take it any longer. I sat a Civil Service examination for management interns. Successful candidates were offered training positions at a professional level with an assured place on a fast promotion track. Having done well in the exam, I was offered jobs at a number of federal government facilities. Finally, I chose the Watervliet arsenal, where they make artillery pieces for the Army. It allowed me to continue studying at the Syracuse University joint graduate program in Public Administration. At the arsenal I became an Organization and Methods examiner. Happily, I was assigned to do several interesting studies which resulted in major reorganizations of parts of the arsenal procurement and manufacturing departments. I was also able to continue my studies. Indeed, I was encouraged by my teachers to use my arsenal studies as case studies in my academic work.

After a class I was talking to one of my fellow students. He told me he had taken the Foreign Service exam and had failed. I asked him how one applied to take the exam. He advised me to get an application at the Post Office. "You must go to New York to take the written exam. If you are successful, you must then pass a further hurdle-a man-eating oral exam."

Undaunted, I took the examination, passed it, and came in the Foreign Service in September 1956.

Q: Had you, in your travels had any feel about the Foreign Service?

MCNAMARA: Yes. When I was a young sailor, at the end of World War II, I read an advertisement for the Foreign Service. Obviously, I had no qualifications at the time; I hadn't even graduated from high school. But I remember thinking, "Doesn't that sound interesting; I would like to be a Foreign Service officer." I had a grand-aunt who was married to a Cuban diplomat. Her stories of diplomatic life had aroused my interest as a young boy. Moreover, I had always wanted to travel and was not content to live my life in a small town in upstate New York. Finally, I had keen interest in history and foreign relations.

Q: I assume you came in in a class?

MCNAMARA: Yes.

Q: What was the class like? Can you characterize them, not only what they were like, but their outlook? How did they see what they were going to be doing?

MCNAMARA: It was the biggest class that had come into the Foreign Service up to that time. There were, I think, 43 or 44 members. It was a big class.

Q: I came in in class number one, in July of '55, and there were only about 20, 21 of us.

MCNAMARA: My class entered in September 1956. Our entry was delayed because the Department was changing the class structure of the Foreign Service. My class was the first to start at FSO-8's. In a sense we were duped. I was encouraged to avoid the summer heat in Washington. "Come down in September after the heat has passed." I was pleased to pass the summer at home and have a good time, not knowing that I was being screwed out of an automatic promotion. Those who came in the month before were automatically promoted to FSO-7 when the new eight grade structure was imposed.

In terms of the class composition, over half of the people in my class had come from one university, or had at least gone to one university, Harvard.

Q: Good God.

MCNAMARA: Yes. They may not have all gone to undergraduate school, but they had at least been to graduate school at Harvard. Over half of them.

Q: That's amazing.

MCNAMARA: So you can see the kind of people who were being recruited. Aside from those from Harvard, there were a few people from Dartmouth, a few people from Yale, a few people from Princeton. Ultimately, we had about three-quarters of the class coming from Ivy League schools. The remaining quarter was not all that broadly representative either. Aside from the odd mavericks like me (I'd gone to a girls' college and to a Canadian university), there were one or two people who'd been to the University of California at Berkeley. Another had a doctorate from the University of Wisconsin in history. I don't think there was anyone from a southern university. The few from the midwest were from the University of Chicago, Wisconsin and the University of Illinois. Clearly, the group was not representative of America.

Q: They were all male, I assume.

MCNAMARA: No, there were three women. No blacks and no Orientals. Hispanics? There may have been one or two people with Hispanic last names. However, there was no one that spoke Spanish as a first language or who might be obviously identified as a Hispanic. The class was not representative of America in its diversity. Rather, it was drawn almost exclusively from the white upper-middle class. Some three-quarters of the class could be so characterized, with a few patricians, but mainly upper-middle-class.

In terms of the outlook, at that time, the Foreign Service was a career that was sought after. There were people in my class, for instance, who came to Georgetown to take a special year-long cram course. They would have already graduated from a university. After a year at Georgetown cramming for the exam, they were given a B.S. in Foreign Service. This seemed phoney to me. As an indication of the desirability of a Foreign Service career in those days, there were people who had taken the exam four and five times before passing. The process was highly selective. The best and the brightest definitely sought places in the Foreign Service. In more recent times, people with similar levels of ability and education have been more attracted to medicine, the law and Wall Street. Our group was short on diversity, but long on intellect and idealism. At that time, the Foreign Service was attracting very good second class minds. I reckon only a few other institutions could make the same claim, e.g., the Harvard faculty and certain medical schools.

Q: I assume most who came probably had some military experience, too, didn't they?

MCNAMARA: Almost everybody. The draft was still in force at this time. Virtually everyone, aside from the three women, had been in the military.

An age restriction was in force at that time. You couldn't be over 32, coming in. So there were none of the sorts of people that come in the Foreign Service now; you know, the 45-year-old former submarine captain who takes the junior-officer examination and comes into the Foreign Service as a consular officer.

The oldest guy in the class was John Burke, who ultimately became ambassador in Guyana at the time of the Jonestown incident.

Q: The mass suicide, over 900 people.

MCNAMARA: Yes, the mass suicide at Jonestown. It blighted his career. He was 31 when he came in. He had been a lieutenant commander in the Navy. In terms of previous rank, he was no doubt the most senior person in the class. There were a few others who were almost as old.

But mainly my classmates had been to graduate school, been in the military and had traveled or studied abroad. Their average age was about 27.

Q: That was pretty much the experience of my group that came in a year before.

MCNAMARA: Yes, I imagine they would have been pretty much the same sorts of people, and at the same age. I was 28, but I think the average was probably about 27. Four years of college, which would take you up to about 21; two years of military, which would take you up to about 23; then graduate school for a year or two, you're at least 25 or 26. Then the exam process was lengthy.

Q: Most were married, too, probably.

MCNAMARA: Probably half.

Q: No, but at least half.

MCNAMARA: About half. I'm not sure now, but I suppose about half.

Q: What did you do when you got out of that? Did you go overseas right away?

MCNAMARA: I went overseas right away. I was assigned as an economic officer. They were desperately looking for people with economic backgrounds. I'd read economic history, and so, although I wasn't an economist by any stretch of the imagination, I'd had a good deal of economics. So I was assigned as economic officer to Salisbury, in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, in Africa.

Q: This would have been in 1957.

MCNAMARA: Yes. We had the regular introductory course, the A-100 course, which was the junior Foreign Service indoctrination course. Then we did two or three months of language; virtually nobody had enough spoken language to pass the Foreign Service language requirement at the time. I certainly didn't. Most others were in the same boat. Oddly enough, a lot of my classmates had gone to universities overseas for a year or so. Most often in England or France. It seemed to be very popular at the time. In any case, my first assignment was to Africa.

Q: Was it just an assignment, or had you requested it?

MCNAMARA: No, no, I had no idea. Africa was the furthest thing from my mind. My visions of Africa were formed by missionaries coming to our church, telling us about their experience in mud and wattle huts, with spear-chuckers and so on. I had no idea of what Africa was about, and certainly no interest in going there.

I first came to know of my assignment at a little ceremony at which the assignments were announced. Someone from Foreign Service Personnel read a long list with great pomp. When he got to my name, he said, "Salisbury."

I thought he said, "Salzburg." I could hear Mozart playing in my inner ear, and I thought, "Oh, how marvelous!"

The guy next to me, Goody Cooke...

Q: I supervised him in Belgrade later on.

MCNAMARA: Did you. Well, Goody finally left the Foreign Service and became a vice president for international affairs at Syracuse University. As far as I know, that's where he still is.

Anyway, he poked me in the ribs and said, "No, you ass, it's in Africa. It's Salisbury."

Then I began to wonder, "How the hell am I going to tell my wife that we're going to Africa?" Our first child was a year old or less and she was pregnant with the second. This would be quite a shock for her. Anyway, I went home and broke the news to her. Initially, she cried. But she's a tough lady. After she recovered from the first shock, we started looking into the place and reading about it and talking to people. We then changed our minds and decided that this might not be such a bad place. Anyway, we were going to give it a shot. So we prepared ourselves, and the Foreign Service prepared us.

In those days, the old Foreign Service still maintained some gentile perks.

For instance, when we flew transatlantic, although I was only a third secretary and a vice consul, the whole family went first class. We got on an all-first-class BOAC (British Overseas Airways Corporation) flight from New York. We even had bunks on the airplane. It was very comfortable. The old Boeing Stratocruiser was a marvelous airplane. It had two decks: there was a cocktail lounge on the lower deck, and then seats and bunks on the upper deck. We had a fine dinner with good wines. The cabin staff treated us royally. Bunks were made up after dinner and my wife and daughter went to bed. I descended to the cocktail lounge. There were lots of people down there, and everybody was in a merry mood at 30,000 feet above the Atlantic. In those days flights were long. Our flight was to be even longer as strong head winds forced us to turn back to Newfoundland. Nobody really cared. Most of the passengers had spent the evening in the cocktail lounge. After the landing in Newfoundland, I went up and stayed with the baby so my wife could share in the conviviality of the cocktail lounge. Our crossing was very merry, indeed.

We stopped in England for a few days, to do some sightseeing. My wife had never been out of the United States, so this was a great experience for her. At that time, few ordinary Americans had traveled outside the country aside from the GIs who had gone to foreign wars. Most Americans had no opportunity nor did they consider overseas traveling in the way we do now.

After the UK, we went on to Italy where we spent a few days in Rome seeing the sights both ancient and modern.

Our real adventure then began as we boarded a BOAC flight for Africa. This time we were on a new turbojet aircraft called the Britannia. The flight was from Rome to Salisbury. It was a long overnight flight for the aircraft in those days were not very fast.

Finally, after a full night, we arrived in Salisbury at about 11:00 AM. To our amazement, we saw a big, modern city, with tall buildings shining in the bright sunlight. It was absolutely beautiful. We were met by a large group from the consulate general. My boss, whose name was Curt Strong, was there with Dick Murphy, and his wife. Even the Federal Government's protocol officer was out to greet us and to whisk us through customs and immigration. It was quite a turnout for a vice consul on his first tour. We floated on happy clouds as we left the airport. Our friendly reception was so much better than we expected and the city itself seemed to be something out of the Wizard of Oz rising out of the African veldt.

Salisbury was going through a boom. Housing was hard to find. Nonetheless, Dick Murphy had found a house for us, completely furnished, that we could move into for three or four months while the owner, a retired judge from South Africa named Leslie Blackwell, went on a trip around the world. This was perfect for us. We stayed in a hotel for only a week before moving into a dream house set on a grassy knoll. Our only responsibility was to care for the judge's dogs.

It was hard to find a house. There was no government housing provided, as there is now, for people in the Foreign Service in Africa. No one looked for a house for you, you had to find your own place to live. We searched endlessly to find something within our allowances, which were not so generous for a junior officer in those days.

Ultimately, I heard at a cocktail party, of a little house being rented, and rushed in the middle of the night to see the owner. We were desperate! I awakened him and got him to agree to rent the house to me. He said he would on the condition that I take care of his cacti. He had a garden full of cacti; that's all there was in the garden. He insisted that I take on his gardener. We couldn't rent the house without taking this gentleman with the cacti. At this point, I said, "Sure. No problem. Whatever you say." We took the old reprobate as our cacti gardener and got the house.

In this same period, my second daughter was born. At that time, there was no medical evacuation or special State Department provided medical facilities. My wife just went into the local hospital and had the baby. Luckily, she had no complications. She was healthy and the birth was normal. Now, so often, wives come back to the United States rather than have children overseas, especially in Africa. They insist on special facilities and are often medically evacuated.

Q: Terry, in the first place, what was the situation in Rhodesia and Nyasaland?

MCNAMARA: The situation when I arrived was that the British had formed the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. It was composed of three territories: Southern Rhodesia was a self-governing colony. Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland were both British protectorates administered from Westminster by a colonial administration.

Q: Which turned into what?

MCNAMARA: Southern Rhodesia became Rhodesia and then Zimbabwe; Northern Rhodesia became Zambia; and Nyasaland became Malawi. The Central African federation had been formed by the British with the hope that it would be multiracial. In theory, Africans were to be given equal rights. The official formula was one of equal rights for all civilized men. Conveniently, "Civilized men" was not carefully defined. What it meant in local terms, was: Men like us. Clearly, it was the kind of formulation that lent itself to easy abuse.

The Southern Rhodesian whites wanted Federation because they had run out of money. They wanted control of the rich copper mines of Northern Rhodesia. At the time Northern Rhodesia was one of the richest sources of copper in the world. It was a real money-spinner. Nyasaland, on the other hand, was broke. It was a poor but beautiful place. The British wanted to unload Nyasaland because of the chronic deficit which they had to subsidize. A deal, therefore, was made with the settler dominated government in Southern Rhodesia (a self-governing colony that had never been directly administered from Whitehall). Indeed, Southern Rhodesia had been settled by Cecil Rhodes, from South Africa, and set up as a private fief. By 1924, the colony was in deep financial difficulty and had to be taken over by the Crown...as a self-governing colony, governed by the local whites.

The federation was set up, with its own elected government. A white Northern Rhodesian was elected as the prime minister. His name was Sir Roy Walensky. The federation was internally self-governing. While the British had limited reserved powers, the Federation-within its constitutional sphere-was virtually independent. Indeed, Walensky-as Prime Minister-attended Commonwealth conferences normally reserved to the head of sovereign governments.

However, the British still controlled the administration of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The colonial office controlled those two places, and there were defined powers in the federal constitution reserved to the territorial governments. Those reserved powers essentially dealt with the local administration of the indigenous population and of natural resources.

Q: I.e., the black Africans.

MCNAMARA: The black Africans, yes. Whitehall, the British government, had held on to some of this power as a protection for the black population. There were large divisions in opinion in Britain. Many in Britain felt that the British government was selling out its real responsibilities to the Africans by turning them over to the tender mercies of the colonists in Southern Rhodesia. So the government was not able to simply turnover full powers to a settler dominated government. But things appeared to be heading in that direction.

While I was there, African nationalist groups began to form. An African National Congress was formed in Southern Rhodesia, for instance. In Northern Rhodesia, UNIP was formed.

Q: What was UNIP?

MCNAMARA: United National Independence Party, the African nationalist party. Kenneth Kaunda was UNIP's first president, and became the president of Zambia after independence. He lost power only recently when they had the first real post-independence democratic election. I was also in Salisbury when Dr. Banda returned to Nyasaland (Malawi).

As these African nationalist groups began to assert themselves, they rejected the idea of federation with Southern Rhodesia. Ultimately, they forced the British government to end the federation and grant them independence as separate countries.

Q: Was this during your time?

MCNAMARA: No.

Q: We're looking at the situation when you were there.

MCNAMARA: The situation was still hopeful while I was there. In fact, even in Southern Rhodesia, there was a prime minister, Garfield Todd, a New Zealander, a missionary, who did make a genuine effort to create a multiracial state. But he was clearly out of tune with the bulk of settler opinion in Southern Rhodesia and was ultimately rejected.

When I first arrived in 1957, we were optimistic that a genuine multiracial state could evolve. We had a new consul general who was assigned while I was there, a man named Joe Palmer. He was convinced he was going to be the first ambassador to the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. This is an indication of the extent to which we deluded ourselves. We were taken in by the British who told us that, oh, yes, they knew how to bring about these constitutional changes. It would all take place in a gradual, liberal way. African reservations would be gotten over. The settlers wouldn't be allowed to dominate the federation.

During my second year in Salisbury reality began to sink in. It became obvious to me that this wasn't going to happen. As African nationalist groups began to form and to organize active opposition to settler control and to the federation itself, my doubts grew, especially as white intransigence grew in response to rising African demands. Multi racialism became increasingly undermined by a hardening of opinion on both sides of the racial divide. By the time of my departure in 1959, I was convinced that the British government wouldn't be able to turnover control to a white dominated federal government. My supervisors, however, had not reached this sad conclusion.

Q: At this time, we're talking about 1957, '58, '59, when you were out there, what did we see as American interests in that area?

MCNAMARA: There were two or three interests.

One, was access to the minerals. Indeed, there was substantial American investment in the mines of Northern and Southern Rhodesia.

We also had a more altruistic political interest. In those days, Americans were dedicated to an ending of colonialism in Africa. We encouraged a peaceful transition from European colonial rule to self-government. Our dim colonial past with its rich mythology led many Americans to a strong, sentimental anti-colonialism. This ideological commitment was a fundamental part of our policy towards Africa. Nonetheless, it was often tempered by pragmatic needs to placate European allies important to us in the cold war context. Frequently, our commitments to rapid decolonization was compromised but it was always there. It was always an underlying factor coloring even the most cynical decisions.

Q: In Salisbury, what were you doing?

MCNAMARA: Well, I started as the number-two economic officer. There was a very nice man named Curt Strong who was the number-one economic officer. I was his assistant. And then, when the new consul general, Joe Palmer, came, Curt Strong became his deputy, and I became the head of the Economic and Commercial Sections.

Q: What were your main activities?

MCNAMARA: Mainly writing the economic reports on the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, because it was an economy of some strength and of considerable interest to the United States because of the minerals. We were very interested in the minerals coming from Rhodesia, and access to them, and the American companies that were involved in their exploitation.

Q: What was your impression of the American companies that were involved in this? Would you put them in the white settlers' camp completely, or were they trying to play a longer-term role?

MCNAMARA: Depended on the company. Rhodesian Selection Trust, which had a strong American element in it, was the more liberal of the two large mining companies in Northern Rhodesia. The other one was Anglo American, which was American only in name. In fact, it belonged to the Oppenheimer group from South Africa, with British and South African ties. Rhodesian Selection Trust was more liberal, probably because of the American participation in the company. This was not true of all Americans in Rhodesia. There were some Americans who had been in Rhodesia for many years, their attitudes were indistinguishable from the run-of-the-mill white Rhodesian.

Q: What about your contacts with these white Rhodesians? Did our policy stand out? Was it publicly expressed, and did you get into a lot of arguments? Or were we just sort of hoping?

MCNAMARA: We had frequent arguments despite warm personal relations. They thought that we were misguided, and naive. Moreover, there was deep resentment of our anti-colonialist stances in international fora.

Q: Was there any black representation? Did you have any contact with the up-and-coming blacks?

MCNAMARA: Yes, we got to know the leadership of the nascent black nationalist organizations. Contact was limited and strained; strained in the sense that it wasn't a natural give and take. We sought out these guys, trying to make contact with them, trying to assure them of our interest and encourage them. But because, I suppose, they were products of their own society, it was rare that one could have a normal, ordinary kind of personal relationship with them. There were only a few people, two or three blacks that I can remember, that I could say that I had a normal personal relationship with where you could talk about anything, not just about great political events, but about ordinary things. There were a few, but not many.

Q: Could you only go to certain places with blacks and that sort of thing?

MCNAMARA: Oh, yes, there was segregation; far less than in South Africa, but it still existed. While I was there, they opened up a multiracial hotel, for instance. But that was the first one. You could eat there with blacks in a hotel, but it was unusual and a little artificial.

Q: Was the consulate general subordinate to London?

MCNAMARA: Theoretically, but in fact not at all. The only relationship with London would have been in terms of lateral communication. Embassy London would report on what the colonial office and the Foreign and Commonwealth Relations Office would tell them about London's relations with the federal government. We told London what was going on in terms of British actions and policy in relation to the federation. But we were as autonomous of London control as the federal government was.

Q: Was there any concern at that time about Soviet penetration, Communist influence?

MCNAMARA: There was some.

Q: You didn't lie awake at night?

MCNAMARA: No, it was not preoccupying, in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland.

Q: How were you seeing the...

MCNAMARA: The world? The colonial police pretty much dominated the scene. There weren't any known Soviet agents who weren't either in jail or closely watched.

Q: Where did you think the Belgian Congo was going to go? Later, you were right in the thick of that, but at the time you were in Rhodesia, what was the prognosis among our people there?

MCNAMARA: Well, as I recall, people thought that the Belgians were going to be very slow in moving towards independence. Their colonial theory was to bring the whole population along a stage at a time. They consciously tried not to create an elite. They were going to give everybody a primary school education, and everybody a secondary school education, and then ultimately go beyond that. It was an authoritarian, paternalistic attitude towards the Africans. They just didn't do what the French did at all, in consciously creating an elite. In fact, they did just the opposite. They tried not to create an elite. And so, at independence time, all you had was a handful of university graduates. The few who had gone beyond secondary school were mainly Catholic seminarians or ex-seminarians. Kasavubu was a perfect example of this group.

Q: Were you carrying on any sort of a watching brief on this?

MCNAMARA: No. We had a consulate general in Leopoldville. I visited Elisabethville once when I did a long tour through Northern Rhodesia. There's a part of Southeastern Zaire that sticks down into Zambia.

Q: It looks like a penis sticking up there.

MCNAMARA: Well, I was going from the Zambia copperbelt up into the northern province, which is the part above that penis that sticks down into the middle of Zambia, penetrating Zambia. No official Americans had been to the Northern or the Luapula Provinces in years. In any case, I went through what was then the Belgian Congo and stopped in Elisabethville overnight. This was in 1959, I guess, a year before Congo independence. There was much more mixing of the races in the Congo. One felt a certain tension. For instance, I saw a violent argument between a black and a white that seemed to be on the point of fisticuffs. You would never see that in Rhodesia; no black would dare get out of line to that degree in Rhodesia in those days, even in Northern Rhodesia. This apparently was not the case in the Congo. At the same time, nobody expected independence. The Belgians panicked and gave independence within months of riots in Leopoldville.

Q: You left Salisbury when?

MCNAMARA: In 1959.

Q: And you came back and went into INR. That's where we served together. I came about a year later. You were in INR from '59 to '61. What were you doing there?

MCNAMARA: I was the analyst for the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. I was both political and economic analyst. Ultimately, I was also analyst for Mozambique and Angola.

Q: These were heady days as far as Africa was concerned. What was within INR? Can you describe it? In the first place, was there much of a cadre there, or was it pretty much people brought in who really didn't have relevant experience? How did you feel about INR?

MCNAMARA: It was very much a mix. There were a few people who had long experience as researchers in INR. The bulk of the analysts, however, were young Foreign Service officers who had little or no experience.

Q: I came from Saudi Arabia and was the analyst for the Horn of Africa.

MCNAMARA: You weren't alone, as you'll recall. I knew Rhodesia pretty well, but I was exceptional in that sense. There were very few people who really had any depth of relevant experience. As a result, the analysis that was coming out of INR was sadly superficial.

Q: How did you feel that the INR product was being used by the desks?

MCNAMARA: I don't think it was being used at all. Although, in my case, I worked very closely with the desk officer, because I'd been to the country that I was dealing with. He knew that and he used me as a gofer. I did a lot of papers for him. I would write papers for the desk officer that would not have been appreciated by my boss, Bob Baum. I don't think he liked the fact that I would do these little jobs on the side for the desk officer. He wanted me to devote myself to writing those long "NIS" tomes that we were charged with grinding out.

Q: That awful National Intelligence Summary?

MCNAMARA: Yes. Soul-destroying.

Q: Complete waste.

MCNAMARA: A great waste of money and time.

Q: It was done for the CIA, an encyclopedia on every country in the world.

MCNAMARA: And probably never used.

Q: A huge bureaucracy for editing.

MCNAMARA: There could be no opinions expressed, overtly at least, in the text. It had to be, as they put it, completely objective. When you try to get to that degree of objectivity, the degree that they sought, it becomes a meaningless compendium of undigested facts.

Q: Yes. You were there when the Kennedy administration came in, and also when a number of countries were becoming independent. This was when, all of a sudden, Africa was on the front page as far as we were concerned. Did you feel any of the excitement about Africa? Did you feel sort of Africanist at all, or not?

MCNAMARA: To a degree, I felt the excitement of the times. The countries I was dealing with, however, were not among those that were becoming independent. What I felt was the inevitability of independence throughout the continent. I tried to write a paper about what I saw would be the demise of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland and the ultimate independence of the constituent territories. Our chief, Bob Baum, told me I was crazy.

Q: He was the head of African research. He was a civil servant who'd been there for many years.

MCNAMARA: That's right. He was cross-eyed, as you'll recall, and whenever he looked at you, he was usually talking to someone else, and when he looked at your neighbor, he might well be talking to you. The resultant defenestration gave me an ulcer. He'd appear to be looking at somebody else and chewing them out about something that I had done. I'd think, "Ah, I got away with it." In reality he was indeed chastising me. Then, when he seemed to be looking straight at me, he'd be talking about something I had no idea of. I would then think, "What the hell's he hollering at me for about this?" In fact, he was talking to someone on my right. As you might imagine, I became a little disoriented by Bob.

But it was a very heady time elsewhere in Africa. In July 1960, all the Francophones became independent overnight. The Belgian Congo joined them in a disastrous way. Nigeria also gained its independence during the same period. The countries that I was working on seemed left out. However, one could see that these countries couldn't remain in colonial isolation.

I came up with a concept, which was later taken on by other people, of a gradual peeling back of layers like the skins of an onion. The nub of white dominance in Africa was South Africa. We all recognized this. There were layers of white dominance north of South Africa that sheltered South Africa. I suggested that those layers would gradually be peeled back exposing other layers until South Africa itself was directly exposed. This process took place in subsequent years. In fact, it began with Katanga and continued with the colonial wars in Angola and Mozambique. At the same time, the nationalist movements in Zambia and Malawi and in Rhodesia itself became increasingly active. The process led ultimately to the breakup of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, which took place in '63. In 1960-'61, I conceived of these phenomena as part of a historic process.

When I was in INR, I wrote a paper, which was massaged by other people, predicting that the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland would break up, that there would be wars of national liberation in Rhodesia. The decisive factor, I believed, would be Mozambique. As long as Mozambique was held by the Portuguese, the Rhodesians could hold out. Once the long eastern flank of Rhodesia was exposed, the Rhodesian forces would become overextended and unable to cope with the defenses of this large country. I consulted with the analyst for Portugal during this period. He reckoned that when Salazar went, things would quickly change in Portugal. The military, he said, would become the dominant force. Without Salazar, Portugal would lose its will to continue the struggle against African nationalism and would become independent. An overextended Rhodesia, I reckoned, would not long survive.

Q: What was your attitude, but also that of other people in INR, towards black rule in Africa at the time? How effective did you think it would be and where was it going?

MCNAMARA: There was a period of euphoria. I was less euphoric than some others. But generally speaking, I joined my colleagues in thinking that this was a good thing, and that it would lead to a brighter future for Africa. I was somewhat more reserved in my enthusiasm in assuming that these countries would go through some painful teething problems. Nonetheless, I believed independence would ultimately be a beneficial thing. Now, what happened in the Congo in 1960 further dampened enthusiasm, but not completely.

Q: Did you get at all involved, in a peripheral way, by being duty officer or something like that, with the Congo business?

MCNAMARA: Yes. We were duty officers every few weeks. Moreover, Northern Rhodesia had a common border with the Congo. Therefore, I followed events across the border closely. In any case, it was a question of great interest to any Africanist.

Q: I just recall being duty officer and finding that Roger Hilsman, who was the head of INR at the time, who was an old OSS type and all that, and one of Kennedy's activists, I guess you'd call it, seemed to be, from my little experience, entranced with what was happening in the Congo, and thought of it in terms of World War II rather than in the African context.

MCNAMARA: Well, on a totally different plane, but involving Roger Hilsman shortly after he came to INR, I was duty officer for "Special Intelligence" in INR, i.e. intercepts.

Q: By intercepts we mean picking up from radio, mainly.

MCNAMARA: Not just radio. We handled all kinds of electronic intelligence, highly secret stuff. Anyway, it was when Laos was a big issue. Kennedy had tried to work out a deal, in terms of Laos. As I recall, he'd threatened to send troops to Thailand.

Q: I think we moved some troops to Thailand, and we were talking about putting troops in there, which was sort of a bluff.

MCNAMARA: I think that's right. Anyway, this was a gamble, to try to scare off the Pathet Lao. I don't remember the details now. I certainly wasn't involved in any of this, except that I was the watch officer responsible for bringing "special intelligence" reports to Hilsman's attention.

Bob Baum sent me there for my punishment because I'd said that Rhodesia and Nyasaland were going to break up. He thought I was harebrained.

In any case, I went to Roger Hilsman's office in the evening. I don't remember exactly why he was there or what time it was. I was on the night shift. When I gave him a report that the Lao had apparently backed down he jumped up and down like a little boy, saying, "Oh, we've won! We've won! We've won our gamble!" It was an indication, apparently, that the Pathet Lao or somebody or other had backed off. And he acted like an enthusiastic cheer leader.

Q: One had the feeling that it was sort of a game with some of these people.

MCNAMARA: I don't know whether it was a game or not, but he seemed to me...I had very little direct contact with him, but on this occasion, he seemed juvenile. He was acting as if it were a game. It was as if his favorite team had just won the World Series. It's not quite that way. In the real world, this isn't the World Series. This was much more serious than games. But, anyway, there was an element of that.

I may be misjudging him. I was seeing somebody who I really didn't know, acting foolishly.

Q: Well, I had the same feeling when I saw him, where he was trying to relate movements of Congolese troops into the Congo. The INR officer, Owen Roberts, said to me, "Don't pay any attention to these reported sightings. These are newsmen who are sitting in the hotel in Leopoldville, reporting that they saw some trucks. These aren't pincer movements." But Hilsman was seeing these, it appeared, anyway...

MCNAMARA: As if he were Rommel. There wasn't any Rommel then, and there was no Afrika Korps, either.

Q: You were only in INR two years. Normally (I remember very well, because we were all trapped), it was about a four-year tour.

MCNAMARA: No, not for junior officers.

Q: Oh, that's right, you were still a junior officer.

MCNAMARA: It was only my second tour. And so it was definitely a two-year tour for me. Bob Baum would have loved to have gotten rid of me earlier. He did send me off to the Pentagon, for my sins. But, no, I had a normal two-year tour, and finished it.

I really wanted to go to Italy. I was in love with all things Italian at that point. I started taking early-morning Italian. I got up every morning through the winter and slugged over to FSI at seven in the morning to take Italian classes. I then had to study at night after working all day.

Q: Learning those dialogues. I was doing the same thing with German when you were doing that with Italian.

MCNAMARA: Hoping that I'd get an assignment to Italy. At the same time, our salaries were meager in those days, as you recall. I had three children and a wife to support, and it was not easy in Washington in those days.

Q: Most of us were renting.

MCNAMARA: I had an apartment. I couldn't afford anything else.

Q: When you went overseas, you got a housing allowance, which made a tremendous difference.

MCNAMARA: Yes.

Q: And also the dollar was extremely strong.

MCNAMARA: That's right. We were still riding the post-war wave, economically, and so the dollar was way up, in terms of real value. When overseas we also got allowances. In Washington, it was disaster for somebody who was trying to live on a junior officer's salary.

Q: And, of course, wives didn't work in those days.

MCNAMARA: No. My wife couldn't have, anyway, she had three small children.

Q: How did your next assignment come about?

MCNAMARA: Well, I was doing my Italian every morning dreaming of Venezia, Firenze or some other delightful Italian posting. One day late in March I had a call from personnel informing me that, "We have you lined up to go to Katanga in the Congo."

Q: This was in the middle of a very...

MCNAMARA: Oh, this was in the middle of a civil war. Katanga was in secession from the rest of the country. Fighting actually hadn't started in Katanga itself, between the UN and the Katangans, but, nonetheless, there were plenty of problems and it was a very troubled place.

Well, anyway, in those days, you didn't say no to an assignment. You went without argument. Even though I had a wife and small children I went off to Katanga like a good soldier.

Initially, I went by myself. My wife couldn't come with me. There wasn't any way. There was no housing. In those days, they didn't provide housing. So I went to Katanga to get established and to find housing for us. She stayed behind while our kids finished the school year in Washington.

First, I went to Kinshasa, which was then Leopoldville. At the embassy I got briefed by a variety of people, including Frank Carlucci. Mac Godley was the chargé d'affaires at the time. The most memorable aspect of my visit was when Carlucci introduced me to Albert Kalonji, who was the king or the emperor or something or other of the South Kasai, which had also declared itself to be independent. I remember Carlucci introducing me to a man who smiled. Suddenly, somebody else came and shook my hand. I couldn't figure this out. I was talking to one man, and somebody else shook my hand. When we left Kalonji's presence, I asked Frank, "Which one was Kalonji? Who was that guy that shook my hand?"

Frank laughed explaining; "Oh, that's his official hand-shaker. He doesn't shake hands with mortals. He has a semi-divine nature, and can't shake your hand. Kalonji was the one you were talking to."

Q: What were you getting from the embassy? When in '61 did you get there?

MCNAMARA: I got there in August.

Q: What were they saying about the situation in the Congo and Katanga? Katanga became very much the center of...

MCNAMARA: Of interest.

Q: But what were they saying at that time of whether things were going and how they felt about things?

MCNAMARA: Well, things were far from decided in the Congo. There were two sets of potential secessionists: one was the Katangese, the other was the Lumumbists in the northeast. These were being supported by the Russians and the Egyptians at the time.

The embassy was worried that, if the Katangan secession succeeded, it would encourage the secession of this other Russian-backed group. The Cold War was very much at the center of American preoccupation in the Congo in those days. Understandably, the Congolese did not share our concern. They were focused on their own problems. A politically aware minority, however, was beginning to understand how our preoccupation could be exploited to their personal profit.

My impressions of Leopoldville in mid-1961 were of a peaceful, calm city occupying a beautiful site overlooking the Congo River. The Belgians left an impressively modern city with gleaming white buildings set in the deep greens of tropical foliage. I was shown the places where the great events of 1960 had taken place, but by that time, things were quieter.

A meeting of a constituent Assembly was in progress at the university, as I recall. The UN had the members locked in the university grounds trying to get them to choose a government before being released.

Q: Lumumba was alive?

MCNAMARA: Lumumba was dead. He had been killed earlier in the year. To get to Katanga from Leopoldville, I had to...

Q: Katanga was still Elisabethville?

MCNAMARA: Well, the province was Katanga, and the capital was Elisabethville. At that point, there was no direct communication between Leopoldville and Elisabethville, between Katanga and the rest of the Congo. I had to go across the river to Brazzaville in the former French Congo to get an airplane from there to Elisabethville. At that time, Abbé ½ Fulbert Youlou was the president of the Congo (Brazzaville). He was friendly with Tshombe, who was, as you remember, the president of secessionist Katanga. And so I got a UTA flight from Brazzaville to Elisabethville.

Before I went, while I was in Leopoldville (I was in Leopoldville for maybe five, six days), I met some officers from the Indian Army, just by chance. We became friendly, and one of them told me, "Oh, we're going up to Elisabethville in a week or two, and we'll see you up there."

I said, "Fine," and I didn't think anything of it, because I didn't know the significance of this. I was brand new and didn't understand all of the subtleties of troop movements, etc. When I got to Elisabethville, I told Bill Canup, the consul, that Indian troops were on their way to Elisabethville. He was shocked.

Q: Who was the consul there?

MCNAMARA: Bill Canup, who at this point was sleeping with a pistol under his pillow. He was worried by threats that mercenaries would kill him. Reportedly, he had been threatened. American policy was highly unpopular in Katanga. We opposed secession. Our allies disagreed with our efforts to force Katanga to acquiesce. The UN forces were in Katanga and resolutions had been passed that the mercenaries had to leave and the secession had to end. The forces on the ground were mainly innocuous Irish and Swedish troops. Their unthreatening presence suddenly changed as the Indians arrived. The UN troops who were there already were Swedes and Irish, both of whom were very ineffective and who didn't feel that they were there to perform a combat role, nor were they prepared for it. The Indians, on the other hand, were ready to go to war. They were good troops ready for serious military action. Moreover, their governments wanted to bring down Tshombe and end Katangan secession.

Q: Tshombe at that time was seen as a creature of the...

MCNAMARA: Of the Belgians, the British, the Rhodesians and the South Africans. In short, a neo-colonial creature. He was looked on by the Indians and the more militant Africans as a creature of European capitalist influences who were viewed as also supporting white domination in southern Africa.

Q: Just to get a feel for this. Katanga being the rich province of...

MCNAMARA: The bulk of the export wealth of the Congo was produced in Katanga. Like Northern Rhodesia, it was one of the major copper producers in the world. Copper prices were high at that time.

Q: Was there a split? You mentioned the British, the French and the Belgians. Are you talking about those people's commercial interests, or are you talking about their governments?

MCNAMARA: Both.

Q: They were in support of independence?

MCNAMARA: A separatist, independent Katanga. Now they may not have done it openly, but they were generally supportive of secession.

Q: Did they have representatives?

MCNAMARA: Oh, yes, they had consuls general in Elisabethville.

Q: Were you all at loggerheads, kind of?

MCNAMARA: Yes, sort of, in a friendly way, especially with the British who were more ambivalent. Our relations with the British consul were very friendly. The Frenchman, on the other hand, was very angry with our consul. I forget the particular issue now, but he felt that our consul had somehow insulted his honor. I don't recall the nature of the issue, but Tambroscini's reaction was very Corsican. The Belgians were resentful of our support for the central government against Katanga and for the UN position, which was very much against the mercenaries and Belgian Army people. At the time, they had regular Belgian Army personnel training the Katangan gendarmerie.

Q: Who were the mercenaries and what was their role?

MCNAMARA: They were a mixed bag. There were two military groups of foreigners in Katanga. One was made up of regular Belgian Army people who were training and providing cadre for the Katangan gendarmerie, which was really an army. It was called a gendarmerie, but it was the Katangan army. The second group were mercenaries hired from all over the world. There were a number of Belgians, French, British, South Africans, Rhodesians, and a mixed bag of odds and sods from a wide variety of places. An amusing case was the former cook of the governor general of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. I'd known him when he was cooking in Salisbury. He was a Pole, I believe. The mercenaries were hired and paid by the Katangans. However, some of them were working clandestinely for their own governments. Certainly the French were. They were recruited as a team from the French Army and sent to Katanga. Little effort was made to hide their official connection as they openly frequented the French Consulate General. The French government wanted to get its hands on the mineral wealth of Katanga. These mercenaries were there as an instrument of French national policy, there's no question of it.

Q: We didn't support this. What did we do?

MCNAMARA: We opposed it supporting the UN militarily and financially. Without our logistics and financial support, the UN could not have operated in the Congo, and certainly could not have mounted an operation against the Katangans.

Q: Did you have any dealings with Tshombe at all?

MCNAMARA: Yes.

Q: What was your impression of him?

MCNAMARA: A man of great charm. Great charm and intelligence. Good leader. The idea that he was just a creature of neo-colonial influences is a gross exaggeration and misunderstanding of fact.

For instance, the guy in charge of the UN operations in Katanga at that time was Connor Cruise O'Brien. He is an avowed Irish Socialist. As a result he seemed to see everything in terms of British and capitalist conspiracies. These ideological blinders prevented him from even considering that Tshombe might represent an authentic element of African opinion. Like most African political leaders his support was tribally based. He openly opposed the central government. In the beginning he was manipulated, to a degree, by the Belgians, the French and the British. But they did not create his authentic local rapport. It still exists. A lot of the problems in southeastern Zaire continue to exist. There is a lack of trust of a far away control government. Peoples' only real identification is still with tribe and region. The country is an artificial creation of the colonial powers. Prior to independence in 1960, Africans had no role in governance, nor was there any national civic life.

Q: This was something that we were seeing, but what were our relations with Connor Cruise O'Brien?

MCNAMARA: Our relations with Conner Cruise O'Brien were close, because we were on the same side. We were supporting the UN. We were the ones who supplied the essential support. If they didn't have our support...financial and logistic...the UN operation could not have been mounted. As Cruise O'Brien himself acknowledged, the UN Congo operation was based on a U.S.-Third World agreement made in the absence of Russians from the General Assembly.

Q: Financial and logistic, meaning our airplanes were being...

MCNAMARA: Well, at this point, we weren't sending U.S. Air Force planes in. But we were supplying the wherewithal to hire airplanes and buy all of the other things that were needed for an operation of great magnitude.

Q: How many officers were at our consulate there?

MCNAMARA: Oh, let's see. There was the consul, there was me, there was one spook. In addition, we had a small support staff of about four other Americans.

Q: Spook being a CIA representative.

MCNAMARA: That's right. And then there was a couple: the lady was a secretary and the husband was admin. communicator. And then the spook had his own communicator and secretary. That was the whole American complement. Very small.

Q: What were you doing?

MCNAMARA: I was writing political reports.

Q: How'd you go about it?

MCNAMARA: I talked to an awful lot of the people in the UN. We were reporting on military and political. I was talking to a lot of the people at the UN. I was also going around town talking to people and so on. I'd only just arrived. I'd only been there for a couple of weeks before the first bout of fighting started, so I didn't have a hell of a lot of time to get prepared to do normal political reporting.

Q: You were in Elisabethville from '61 to '62. Could you talk about the developments. The troops arrived, and then what happened?

MCNAMARA: What happened was, about a brigade of Indian troops suddenly arrived shortly after I did. They got themselves settled on the ground.

I couldn't find a place to live. And I got to know a Canadian captain, a guy named Marv Rich, who was seconded to the UN command. The Canadians provided the communications, and he was in charge of the Canadian communications group that was there at the headquarters. He had an apartment downtown. He let me move in with him, because he had an extra bedroom. And so I was living in his apartment.

One evening, he said, "I have to go out to the headquarters. I won't be here tonight, so you go ahead and have dinner. Don't worry about me."

I had dinner and went quietly to bed. At about four o'clock in the morning, I was awakened by noise in the central square just down the street. I looked out the window, and saw UN troops and armored cars drawn up in the main square. The post office had been occupied by Katangan "para-commandos." Tensions had been growing over the past few days as the UN picked up mercenaries and Belgian officers. They were scooping them up off the streets, and raiding apartments. Groups of Belgians had already been sent home. In response the para-commandos took over the post office in the center of town. Suddenly, that night, Indian troops came into the Place de Post, in front of the post office. I heard them issue an ultimatum, over a loudspeaker. The apartment I was in was just off the Place, so I could see into the Place and hear what was going on. They gave the Katangans an ultimatum to surrender and leave the post office. When the Katangans refused, the Indians started to shoot. The shooting went on for some time. There was riposte from the Katangans, but they were outgunned and lacked effective leadership. Their mercenary officers were in hiding. The post office was stormed by Indian troops. They weren't Gurkhas. I can't remember the regiment now, but it was not the Gurkhas. By eight o'clock in the morning, resistance had ended. The Katangans had suffered some casualties but most were taken prisoner. After seizing strategic points around the town, the UN troops began a search. This is how the fighting started in Elisabethville based on my own observations.

On the same morning, the UN took over control of the radio station and a couple strategic points. They tried to grab Tshombe in his palace, but he got away before they could seize him. Some people say he got away with the help of the British consul using a secret tunnel to exit the Presidential palace. I don't know whether that's true or not.

Connor Cruise O'Brien, in his book, says that he received the orders to initiate this armed action from a man named Kiari, a Tunisian in the UN hierarchy in Leopoldville. O'Brien assumed at the time, that the order came from Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold. Kiari, he believed, was speaking on behalf of the Secretary General. For the UN the initial military action in a sovereign country was and remains controversial. Connor Cruise O'Brien, in his book, tries to defend himself, saying that it wasn't his initiative; he was simply carrying out an order that he considered to be legitimate. He doesn't say that it was wrong, he just says that he didn't take the initiative. He got an order, which he considered legitimate, from a man who came from Leopoldville and appeared to have the authority to pass it on.

I don't know whether Hammarskjold himself ever got to deny it, but Sir Brian Urquhart denied to me that Hammarskjold had given the order.

Q: He was Hammarskjold's deputy.

MCNAMARA: No he wasn't the deputy, but he was an important aide who was privy to what went on in the SecGen's office.

Q: He was at the peacekeeping level, I think.

MCNAMARA: No, he got to be an Under Secretary General for Peacekeeping later. But he was very close to Hammarskjold. Brian was one of Hammarskjold's aides and very close to Hammarskjold. In fact, he's written a biography of Hammarskjold. He claims that Hammarskjold did not give this order and that he was not aware that they were going to take a military initiative. It's murky as to where the order came from.

However, there is no question as to what was going on in terms of the dynamics within the UN. The Indians and the Africans, the so-called Bandung group, the Ghanaians, the radical Africans and Asians, had made a deal with us. Now I don't know whether the deal was explicit or implicit, but there was certainly a deal. And that was that we would enforce the unity of the Congo, against the wishes of our colonialist allies, in return for their support in keeping the UN presence strong in the country. The UN was seen by us as keeping the Russians and the Egyptians out. It appears that was the deal that was struck. Whether it was implicit or explicit, I don't know. I know of no documentary evidence, but research here may turn up some confidential communications as information becomes declassified.

Q: Well, it never would be like that.

MCNAMARA: It would never be like that. I reckon that an informal deal was struck between the Kennedy administration and Nkrumah and Nehru.

Q: What happened then? I mean, here you are...

MCNAMARA: There I was, in an upstairs window, watching as tracer bullets pass back and forth in front of me. I watched the spectacle through most of the early morning.

The next morning, after the UN Indian troop stormed the Post Office, I came out of the apartment. It was a little risky, because I'm white and I was in civilian clothes-I could have been taken for God knows what by some trigger-happy Indians or others. I remember the apartment house that I was in (I was on the second floor) had a number of shops on the ground floor and there were large columns that supported the upper floors. A number of whites had collected sheltering behind the columns. I don't know who they were. A couple may have been mercenaries. God knows what they were. But nobody had guns that I could see. Anyway, we were all trying to see what was going on in the Place. And as a UN Swedish armored personnel carrier (APC) came up the street past us, we hid behind a column. As the APC came in front of us, we shifted our position so that we always had a column between us and them.

Somewhat later, I visited a small hotel that housed some mercenaries. A number of mercenaries and Belgian officers were hanging around in civilian clothes not knowing what to do next. I listened and mixed with the crowd. Since I had only just arrived in Elisabethville, no one knew by appearance, I was just another white male of about 30 years.

Then I went to the consulate general and helped draft reports on what had happened, including my own observations. We had not known the military action was planned, nor did we expect anything so dramatic.

Q: How did business carry on after that? What was happening and how did you all operate?

MCNAMARA: That day, there were a couple of things that happened. One, the African population began hunting Ba-Lubas. Ba-Lubas are from Kasai, and from Northern Katanga. They were not viewed favorably by tribesmen from southern Katanga who provided the bulk of support for Tshombe's separatist movement. On the contrary, the Ba-Lubas strongly supported the central government. The antagonism stems, at least in part, from the large number of Ba-Lubas that enjoyed well paid jobs, especially with the copper company. There was a large colony of them living in Elisabethville. By mid-afternoon the Ba-Luba hunts began throughout Elisabethville. Groups of young Katangans sought them out, beat them and often killed them.

I was walking down the main street of Elisabethville that day when suddenly I saw a man peddling like mad on a bicycle, with a gang of youths chasing him on foot. Finally, one guy caught up to him. This gent had a bicycle chain attached to a stick that he used like a whip. It wrapped around the unfortunate's neck. The chaser then yanked the man backwards off the bicycle. He landed with a sickening thud. The chain had cut into his neck and was strangling him. The gang of assailants then proceeded to kick him to death.

The Ba-Luba pogrom caused the tribe's local population to move into a camp under the protection of the UN. They remained living in harsh conditions in a village, fed by the UN for the next two years.

There was a quiescence period several hours after the UN made their early morning move. Early in the afternoon I left the consulate with a colleague named Tom Cassilly, who was in Elisabethville on TDY, to get the wife of the CIA communicator, Will Poole. We were trying to concentrate the Americans at the consulate and in houses where they would be more accessible, less isolated and in areas away from points of potential conflict. We picked up "Dottie" Poole in the consulate Jeep and were bringing her back to the consulate building, when suddenly we ran into Katangan troops preparing an attack on the UN headquarters. When they saw our Jeep, they began shooting at us. We were in one of those Jeep station wagons, the old high-bodied variety. They mistook it for a UN vehicle.

Q: I think they were called Travelalls or something.

MCNAMARA: I don't remember what they were called. This was just a plain old Jeep station wagon, nothing fancy. They thought that we were UN, because of the vehicle. Anyway, we pulled into a driveway, jumped out of the car, and got into a drainage ditch. When the shooting died down, we went to a neighboring house and knocked on the door. A young Belgian couple opened the door and let us in. We all took shelter in their cave, in the back of the house as the rate of firing increased. The Katangans soon surrounded the house. They then banged on the door. When the owner opened up, he was told politely that they wanted us to come out of the house. The man insisted that we were not from the UN. We refused to leave the questionable safety of the house. Surprisingly, they did not force the issue or attempt to enter the house. Instead, they asked the Belgian next door, "Do you think those are UN people?" He assured them that we must be local civilians as our Jeep's license plates were ordinary Congolese private plates.

This seemed to satisfy them, and they went away.

But, Jesus. I mean if they'd grabbed us, God knows what would have happened. Thank God they did not suspect that we were official Americans. We stayed in the Belgian's cave for the best part of the afternoon. Just before dusk, we decided to make a run for it. I told Cassilly to take Mrs. Poole and head up the street where I could shelter behind some buildings. They shot at us as we were leaving, but the bullets were high above the top of the Jeep. Cassilly and Mrs. Poole soon joined me and we returned to her house rather than attempt to cross the town to the consulate.

In her apartment, we had no communications. We simply lay on the floor and hoped the random firing would not penetrate the sides of the building. In the middle of the night, a UN convoy suddenly pulled up in front of the house, complete with armored cars. When we had gone missing, the people in the consulate had organized a search party for us fearing that we had been taken prisoner by the Katangans. Fortunately, the convoy was able to escort us to the consulate.

The relationship between the American Consulate and the UN was very, very close. We supported the operation with advice and intelligence. I was in the UN headquarters every day during the fighting with advice and information crossing lines at some considerable risk.

Q: When you say "advice," what do you mean?

MCNAMARA: Advising on military operations and on the attitude of the population. I gave first hand accounts of Katangan military dispositions and on their reaction to the fighting.

Q: Well, I take it that the UN really didn't have the equivalent to political advisors, as we know them.

MCNAMARA: No, they didn't. But here we were, we had our consulate general situated next to Tshombe's palace. I was floating around town, talking to people, moving between the lines. I found a relatively lightly covered back road leading into the UN camp. The Gurkhas would often provide covering fire while I scooted into the camp. It was an incredible situation, and it went on for some two weeks.

Finally, a cease-fire was declared. The UN had seriously miscalculated Katangan resolve and mercenary abilities. Indeed, French mercenaries had engineered the capture of Jadotville without firing a shot. They were held as hostage. This had much to do with the acceptance of a hasty cease-fire and the conditions of the cease-fire.

A period of uneasy peace followed for some three months. As time passed, things got more and more tense. Early in December the consulate organized a large reception.

A new consul had been appointed. His name was Hoffacker. He took Bill Canup's place. Canup left just after the first bout of fighting. Sadly, he left under a cloud. Apparently he was not seen as being firm enough and tough enough. Hoffacker was, well, I don't want to say sympathetic to the Katangans, but he was at least understanding of them and, I suppose, sympathetic to some degree. He seriously sought a peaceful solution. Unfortunately, there were many who opposed any negotiated settlement. They insisted upon complete capitulation by the Katangans with forced reintegration with the rest of the Congo. It appeared that this hard line view found some favor in high places in Washington. The reception in November was held to honor a visit to Elisabethville by Senator Thomas Dodd-father of Senator Chris Dodd.

Q: Yes.

MCNAMARA: Senator Dodd was in Tshombe's hip pocket. He supported Katangan independence and followed a line pushed by the well-financed Katanga lobbying operation in Washington.

Hoffacker invited both Katangans and UN people to the reception. In his naive way, he thought understanding could be furthered by putting the two immediate protagonists together. Since these UN people on the spot were no more than an instrument, they were unable to change policy made by their betters in Washington, New York, New Delhi or Accra. Only limited tactical decision was made in Elisabethville. Unaware of this reality, poor Hoffacker held an attempted love-in.

By this time, Connor Cruise O'Brien had been replaced by two of Hammarskjold's most tried aides-George Ivan Smith and Brian Urquhart.

After the reception, a smaller dinner was to be held at the local Mobil Oil man's house. Senator Dodd was to be guest of honor. Both Urquhart, Brian and George Ivan Smith were invited. The two UN people arrived at the Mobil Oil man's house at about nine in the evening without guards. Unfortunately, the house was just up the street from the Katangan general's home, which was surrounded by a Katangan Para-commando protection unit. The Para-commandos saw the UN car arrive and the two representatives go in the house. Perhaps, suspecting a plot or a seizing opportunity, they surrounded the house, went inside, and dragged Urquhart and George Ivan Smith out, taking them prisoners. A Belgian banker tried to intervene, and was beaten for his trouble. Just as they were forcing these two UN people into the back of a truck, the motorcade, with Tshombe's motorcycle outriders and a presidential limousine arrived with Senator Dodd and Hoffacker. Rapidly sizing up the situation, Hoffacker jumped from the car. With the help of the Katangan motorcycle escort, he got George Ivan Smith away from the para-commandos. Brian Urquhart, however, was already inside the truck. Hoffacker either did not know he was there or could not get at him. In any case, he got Ivan Smith into the car with Dodd and hurriedly left the scene before the Para-commandos could react. Senator Dodd was in the limousine's back seat being shielded by a 200 pound American Army colonel who was serving as his escort officer. Poor Urquhart was left to the tender mercies of the Para-commandos.

The UN went bananas. The UN troops were ready to go.

By this time, I had become a close friend of the Gurkha commander, a Colonel Mitra of the 3rd Battalion of the 1st Gurkhas. He was all set to storm Tshombe's palace and take Tshombe prisoner. He had his Gurkhas in place across the street from the Palace. I was holding him back while Hoffacker was trying to negotiate Brian's release with Tshombe and some of his ministers. Brian was now being held in an army camp outside town.

Finally they got Urquhart released, but only after the personal intervention of the most intransigent of Tshombe's ministers, Gadfoid Manungo.

After they stood down, one of their company commanders, a major, came by the consulate. He'd been with his troops and was going back to the battalion mess, which was near their headquarters. His troops were in a position some distance away. He swung by our consulate, and I chatted with him at the front gate. We were all great pals by this time; I was very close friends with all the battalion officers. He then left and went up the street about half a block and ran into a group of excited Para-commandos. They apparently took him prisoner, killing his driver on the spot (we heard shots). He has never been heard of since.

This made the Gurkha's fighting mad. They couldn't be sure what had happened to him. If they had known where he was being held or by whom they certainly would have gone after him. Unfortunately, no one had a clear idea of what happened and UN superiors held them back from taking revenge on uninvolved hostages.

Incidentally, through all this, after the first day, we got a platoon of Gurkhas guarding our consulate. We had Gurkhas in the garden. They had a machine gun nest in my office. I would be sitting at my desk trying to write a report, and suddenly I'd sense that somebody was watching me. I'd look up, and there'd be a couple of little brown men looking over my shoulder, watching what I wrote. It was eerie, but not unpleasant. They are among the nicest people I have met. However, they are also among the most ferocious fighters when aroused.

Q: Okay, well why don't we stop here. We'll start, the next time we go around, with what happened after the second round of fighting.

MCNAMARA: We can talk about the second round of fighting and how it started. It didn't start immediately as a result of their taking of prisoners, but that certainly led directly to it. The tensions were then so high that only sparks were needed to ignite another battle.

Q: Today is March 31, 1993. This is the continuation of an interview with Terry McNamara. Terry, you heard the last part of the tape, so we're talking about Katanga II. The fighting died down that first time, and then what happened?

MCNAMARA: There was a period of about two or three months of an uneasy peace. Pressures within the UN in New York had brought about a cease-fire. However, nothing had been solved, aside from the UN forces having consolidated their positions within Elisabethville. However, they still didn't control the town completely; they controlled the European center of the town as well as strategic points around the town.

I suppose I should talk about some personal things now. I arrived in August of 1961. My wife and children had remained in the United States, waiting for me to find a place for us to live. The fighting broke out as they were on their way. Actually, they had gotten as far as Egypt, and were staying with friends of ours in Cairo, named Curt and Jane Strong. Suddenly, the fighting broke out in September and they were forced to remain in Cairo. They stayed there for about a month and a half, and then went onwards to Salisbury, in Rhodesia, where we had been stationed a couple of years before. They were going to stay there until they could come into Elisabethville. They were in Salisbury for a short time, but didn't have any place to live. Finally, they came to Elisabethville in November, and were there during the second bout of fighting.

Q: What was happening to you in between times? You say that the Katangans more or less held the city.

MCNAMARA: They still held parts of the city and, of course, the rest of South Katanga. The UN held the center of the town and a few positions around the city. These included: the airport, their own headquarters on the northern fringes of the city and an area east of the city where the Ba-Luba people had gathered in a refugee camp. The Ba-Lubas were from North Katanga and from Kasai, and there were tribal tensions between them and the people of South Katanga. When the fighting started, the South Katangans went after the Ba-Lubas. In fear, the Ba-Lubas fled to the protection of the UN, a large refugee camp grew up. All sorts of things, unfortunately, were taking place within this refugee camp.

For instance, one day, when I was in the camp with some Swedish soldiers who were there administering and guarding the camp, a group of Ba-Lubas came down the muddy street, chanting and dancing. There was a man leading them, waving a stick much like a drum major. I noticed at a distance that there was something on the end of the stick. As they drew abreast of us, I saw that it was: a penis and testicles, stuck on the end of this stick; a little bit like children skewer a hot dog to the end of a stick to roast it. One of the Swedish soldiers next to me got sick to his stomach when he saw what the Maluba was waving so joyously. Apparently the Ba-Lubas had caught someone, from an opposing tribe, killed him and castrated him.

Evidently, some terrible things were going on. There was even talk of cannibalism. The social tensions under which people were living were so harsh that some people lost usually observed social and moral restraints.

Q: What were you doing in this in-between time, officially?

MCNAMARA: Officially, we were reporting on what was going on. We were trying to maintain contact on all sides, with the UN, with the Katangans, and trying as much as we could, to serve as a conduit between the two, and to ease the tensions to the extent that we could. Sadly there wasn't really much that could be done in Katanga to influence the course of larger events. The tensions were there, obviously. The situation was tinder; all it needed was some sparks to ignite another bout of fighting. But the real decisions, I believe, were made elsewhere.

Q: How was the consulate viewed by the Katangans at that time?

MCNAMARA: Well, we were looked on as the enemy. We were supporting the central government and the UN in their fight against Katanga. The American government supplied the essential element in terms of support for the UN force in the Congo. It couldn't have existed without American support and encouragement. Therefore, we were looked on as an enemy. There had been demonstrations against the consulate, which was, by this time, guarded by Gurkha soldiers, as I said in the earlier interview.

The Cold War was on, and most people viewed the United States as the great power in the world, and certainly the one that had had probably the greatest influence on events in the Congo. Therefore, at the same time that we were viewed as an enemy, we were also viewed as an entity that could be influenced and could be decisive. If they could bring around American opinion to be sympathetic to Katangan separatism or opposed to UN armed intervention in the Congo, then the UN could lose vital support. Secession would succeed if the Katangans could neutralize the UN force. The central government-on its own-was incapable of bringing Katanga to heel.

Q: Was Tshombe much in control there?

MCNAMARA: He was in control. One of the things that Connor Cruise O'Brien, who was in charge of the UN during the first bout of fighting, contended was that Tshombe was simply a creature of the Belgians, the British, and capitalist interests in Union Miniere, the great copper-mining organization that was running the mines in Katanga, and certain other organizations, like Tanganyikan Concessions, which had the majority holding in the Benguela Railway that took much of the production on its railway through Angola to a port at Lobito Bay, and exported them to its markets overseas. O'Brien looked on these international interests as the sole source of Katangan separatism, and that Tshombe and his people were simply manipulated by them. Connor Cruise O'Brien was an Irishman and a Socialist who came by his prejudices naturally. He saw British capitalists under every bed in Katanga.

To give him his due, there was a degree of truth in his allegations. Belgian, and British mining and railway interests were supporting Tshombe. However, O'Brien's sweeping allegations were exaggerated. Tshombe had a genuine African constituency in South Katanga. Tribalism was strong, and there was a natural constituency for separatism.

The Congo, as it was put together by King Leopold, was an artificial entity. It was a creature that was put together by King Leopold and the Europeans. It had no relationship to anything African. It cut across tribal ethnic and natural geographic lines. Few of the people in Africa had any real identity with the Congo as a nation. They didn't have any feeling of nationhood. And certainly the Belgians had never encouraged this during their colonial period. So there really wasn't much of a loyalty to Congo as a nation, or to Congo unity.

The tribes in South Katanga felt that, since the riches were in their territory, they should benefit primarily from these riches. They shouldn't have to share them with others in this very large country, which produced precious little else at this time.

In Katanga itself, they saw many of the best jobs go to outsiders-e.g. Ba-Luba, for instance, from Kasai and from North Katanga-and they resented it. The Ba-Luba were viewed by the mining companies as better workers and people who were better educated than the people from South Katanga tribes. As a result, they were sought after by Belgian employers during the colonial period.

Q: Did you find that our consulate there was operating separately from, say, the Belgians and the British and others?

MCNAMARA: Oh, yes, we were certainly operating very much separately. We were the ones who were supporting the UN. The British and the Belgian governments were opposing what the UN was doing. At times they were forced to pay lip service to Congolese unity. Nonetheless, they all saw their chances of profiting from Katangan riches improved under a separate Katanga government. Moreover, the Rhodesians, South Africans, Portuguese and certain British interests saw Katanga as an outer bulwark against the spread southward of African nationalism.

Q: Well, then, how did this thing play out, particularly focusing on what you and the consulate were doing?

MCNAMARA: We were very close to the people at the UN. The British, French, Belgians, and others were, sometimes openly, sometimes behind the scenes, favoring and working closely with the Katangans.

In the British Consulate, for instance, they had a consul from Rhodesia who was working as a member of the British Consulate. He was a British consul, or vice consul, I don't remember which, whose name was David Smith. He represented the government of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. In fact he was Roy Walensky's and the federal government's man in Katanga. And the federal government looked on Katangan separatism as an important geo-strategic entity that protected the northern border from the spread of African nationalism.

Q: You were doing, I suppose, both the normal reporting, but running back and forth without making any great impression on the Katangans. I mean, they were getting support from these other countries.

MCNAMARA: We were, however, always being courted by them. Lew Hoffacker, who was the consul, was perceived as being sympathetic towards the Katangans. I think that probably exaggerated his real feelings. What he did was go out of his way to make contacts with them, to speak to them, to get their point of view, to try to bring them together with UN people to the extent possible, and to encourage a peaceful solution to their problem. But he was viewed by the Katangans as more friendly than his predecessor, Canup. Ultimately, this was his downfall. He was perceived by some Americans as being too sympathetic towards the Katangan point of view.

Q: Were you getting visitors in, looking you over?

MCNAMARA: Yes, we got visitors from the embassy in Leopoldville. The one visitor of note that we got, as I mentioned in the last interview, was Senator Dodd.

Q: Yes, who got caught in the middle of things. Well, then, what happened? How did the thing break down, and what were you and the consulate doing?

MCNAMARA: To tell you the truth, Stu, it's hard for me now to keep the three bouts of fighting separated; what led up to one or what led up to the other. For anybody who is interested, obviously all they'd have to do is check the newspaper of the day for a chronology.

Q: But anyway, give whatever your impressions were, how you felt about it, that you can recall.

MCNAMARA: Very nervous. It was obvious in November-December that anything could set off another bout of fighting. The UN was building up its forces. They brought in an Ethiopian contingent. I think they brought in additional Indians. A Malayan armored-car company was also added during this period. Forces were obviously being marshaled for another more decisive go.

Something sparked it, and I don't remember what. It seems to me that it was a little exchange of fire between the Katangans and the UN on one of the perimeters, but I don't really remember the incident clearly. Anyway, the kidnapping, obviously, of the UN people and the killing of the Indian officer certainly set the stage for more fighting. It didn't take much to start it.

In November '61, my family came up from Rhodesia, and we had no place to live. I had no place to put them. A friend, Colonel Mitra of the 3/1 Gurkha Rifles, took us in. We lived in his house for a short while, in the UN perimeter, while we were looking for a house of our own. It was very hard to find houses in those days that were within our allowances and that were suitable. I had three small children. The eldest was about five or six, and they ranged down from that to three or four years.

Essentially, the consulate was trying to keep the peace in a very tindery situation. At the same time, we were advising the UN on military and political affairs. They were isolated without much reliable intelligence. I gave them briefings every day to the UN leaders on what was going on in town, the mood of the Katangans, and their military dispositions. Members of the Swedish contingent had cultivated some contacts among the local Belgian population. This seemed to be the extent of their sources of information. Given our greater mobility and wider range of contacts we were able to brief and advise the UN leadership. At the same time, we reported to Washington and to Leopoldville what was going on, on both the UN and on the Katangan side. We described growing tensions and what, on a day-to-day basis, we could see of what was happening on both sides.

The fighting broke out in mid-December. It went on for about two weeks. The outcome was an assertion of UN control over the whole of the center of Elisabethville. They extended their perimeters out to the suburbs of town. The European center of the town was taken over by the UN. The Ethiopians were involved in this, the Swedes, the Irish, and the Indians. The Ethiopians were accused of some atrocities, killing civilians. They killed some Belgians. I remember a woman being killed, allegedly, by the Ethiopians. And as far as I could tell, it was true. But it's not unusual in war, and certainly not unusual under those circumstances. What was more troubling was that a lot of Africans were also being hurt, killed, displaced, and not too much notice was being taken of that.

Anyway, the fighting was reasonably hard. The opposition wasn't well organized, but it was there. Mercenaries were involved in all of the most effective action taken against the UN.

The Katangans had 2 or 3 small jet trainers called "Fougas". They carried small bombs and a couple of machine guns. The UN, on the other hand, had no air support. The Katangans also had a variety of civilian aircraft. The Fouga took on an incredible psychological and symbolic significance. The UN people were bugged by them.

One day, I was in the UN headquarters, and the Irish Army chief of staff, from Ireland, was there. I forget his name now, General something or other. Hammarskjold was expected in Northern Rhodesia to talk about a peace settlement. One of the Fougas bombed and strafed the UN headquarters at about noon. The large foreign press corps was assembled for an impromptu press conference with the Irish general. Katanga had drawn much press interest. People like David Halberstam from the New York Times were covering events. Later some-like Halberstam-became well-known. Suddenly, the Fouga appeared, dove towards us and dropped a small bomb. We all jumped for cover. Somebody landed on top of the Irish general in a slit trench. Clearly, there was great fear of Fouga. I'm not quite sure why, because it's capabilities were very limited. In any case, it took on inordinate symbolic importance.

The second bout of fighting was again inconclusive, aside from the fact that the UN people extended their perimeters and took full control of the center of Elisabethville. They consolidated their positions and took control of the communication between their positions. At this point, they had a large area that took in all of the center of Elisabethville. The only exposed "LOC" was the road to the airport.

During the fighting, things got really nasty as far as Americans were concerned. The Katangans started threatening Americans. They hadn't threatened Americans before. The American missionaries in general were sympathetic towards the Katangans. The Katangans sensed this and were using this sympathy to try to gain a more widespread sympathy in the United States, hoping that... Then, when the fighting started in the second round, they turned against the missionaries and started threatening them, as Americans, because of the American support for the UN forces.

American Air Force airplanes at this point were coming into Elisabethville, bringing in supplies and troops to strengthen the...

Q: Non-American troops, but bringing in supplies.

MCNAMARA: No American troops, but they were bringing in supplies and non-American troops for the UN. In other words, these were American Air Force planes. No longer were they just hired airplanes that were being contracted for by the UN, and maybe paid for with American money, but these were actual USAF airplanes.

The American support for the whole operation was therefore much more obvious to the average Katangan. It was also equally obvious that America was certainly not taking any sort of neutral role, that we were one of the essential elements in this whole thing.

So, naturally, the average Katangan started to be alienated from and angry with America, and threatening of Americans there, even Americans who were sympathetic towards them. It didn't really make much difference.

The Katangans, however, controlled most of the African suburbs of Elisabethville, as well as much of the remaining territory of the province.

We decided that we had to evacuate the American citizens in Elisabethville, because it was getting too dangerous.

At this time, the Seventh Day Adventists had decided to have their regional convention at their headquarters in Elisabethville. They brought people from the United States and from other parts of eastern Africa to Elisabethville. Their headquarters was across the street from the UN headquarters, which was a special target of the Katangans. When fighting started, the Adventists found themselves in the cross-fire between the two sides. The poor Adventists were really under the gun.

With the help of a journalist who had good contacts with the Katangans, we arranged a cease-fire, from twelve to one o'clock, to get them out of their precarious position. I went from our consulate to get them out. I crawled down a long drainage ditch to the back door of the mission building. The cease-fire took place on time. No more shooting. We had an hour to get out. Both sides had agreed to this. So I told the missionaries, "You've got to leave now."

Over the phone they had earlier accepted that they would leave, as soon as a cease-fire could be arranged. When the shooting stopped, however, they changed their minds. Some decided, no, they wouldn't leave. So all refused to leave.

I said, "Look, you've got to go. The shooting is going to start in another hour. We've got one hour to get you out of here. If you don't leave, you're again going to be in exactly the same situation."

"Oh, no, no, no. It's okay now. We can't leave our homes. We can't leave our buildings, all of our work and so on."

After much fruitless urging I had to leave without them. I was sure that as soon as one o'clock came, the shooting was going to start again and I would receive another frantic telephone appeal. "Please get us out of here." Predictably, the shooting started at one o'clock, the war began again, and they were on the phone two or three minutes later, saying, "Oh, you've got to get us out of here!"

With some difficulty, we again arranged another cease-fire. This time, they left without serious resistance.

That evening, we gathered all of the missionaries, not just the Seventh Day Adventists, but the other groups that were in town. The biggest was Southern Baptist.

I organized a convoy into the UN headquarters, and then, from the UN headquarters, at night, out to the airport, with protection from UN forces. I got protection from the Swedes in armored personnel carriers, and from the Gurkhas.

As a prelude and a test run to the biggest evacuation, I took the families from the consulate out to the airport first. We had three or four families, women and children. I took them out earlier, to see how it would all go. We put them in the back of an open Swedish APC and drove out to the airport. There were bullets bouncing off the sides and the Swedes fired machine guns in reply. I recall the spent shell casings flipping into the back of the APC; some fell on my sleeping children.

It was very interesting, the differing reactions of the several families. I was the only male parent present. Otherwise, we had the three mothers with their children. Where the mother was calm, the children remained calm. Where the mother was agitated, nervous and frightened, the children reacted in the same way.

For instance, my ex-wife, who is very tough, was calm, joked with the soldiers and reassured our kids. My children stayed calm and relaxed with the youngest sleeping soundly.

The youngest one fell asleep on the way out, even though the machine guns were blasting away. She hadn't had much sleep the night before. She and my wife had been in our friend Colonel Mitra's house. When the fighting started, and the bullets began bouncing off the outside walls, the colonel put my daughter in the bathtub with a mattress in front of the tub to protect against bullets or shrapnel. She played quietly there for most of the day.

When the fighting started, two of my children had been at school. They were enrolled in a local Catholic school called Marie Josi; ½ school with Belgian and Katangan children. When the fighting started, the wife of the other vice consul, her name is Whipple, went to get the kids. She got her children and mine and took them to her house.

That evening we had to get out of the colonel's house. Mitra told me that UN intelligence had picked up a report that the Katangans would bomb the area of the UN HQ that night. He did not want the kids there. We gathered ourselves together and snuck out in the middle of the night through a little used entrance to the UN perimeter, and went to Whipple's house. Whipple was not pleased at being awakened. His wife, however, was more gracious taking us in and bedding down the children.

The next day, I organized the evacuation and took the Whipple, Hoffacker, and McNamara kids, their mothers, and one or two other wives out to the airport in a Swedish APC under enemy fire. Thank God, the Katangans didn't have heavy weapons.

The Air Attaché's airplane was in the airport when we arrived. He evacuated our families to Northern Rhodesia in his C-47 without any seats on the floor. They landed at Ndola, which is the major city in the copper belt in what's now Zambia. Later on, they went to Salisbury, where they stayed for a few months before returning to Elisabethville.

The next day, I organized a larger evacuation of all of the American community. Most were missionaries. After we'd had the dry run with our own families to see how it worked, we had a better idea of what we were doing. First, we organized the Americans in a convoy using their own vehicles. There were some 200 of them. I led the convoy into the UN perimeter. Escort was organized from there for the run to the airport at night. There was some shooting, but no serious opposition. We got to the airport without casualties. The Air Attaché was there with 2 or 3 airplanes.

I had my friend Mitra, the Gurkha colonel, with me to serve as convoy commander. He was a marvelous man, full of energy, ideas, and brave as a lion. He came along as a personal favor to me. We had developed a close friendship.

When we got to the airport, the perimeter of which was now held by the UN, a couple of the missionaries, after the UN soldiers had protected them and gotten them out to the airport, where they were safe and preparing to be evacuated, complained bitterly about the UN "intervention." I got angry with this wanton ingratitude. The UN soldiers had just risked their lives to protect the missionaries and their families. So I told one of the missionaries what I thought of him. I came close to punching him in the nose, but I resisted the temptation.

Afterwards, I got a letter from the Baptist bishop apologizing to me for the intemperate things that his colleague had said to me, and for his nasty accusations of the American government. Above all, the bishop disassociated himself and his church from the defamatory remarks aimed at soldiers who had risked their lives to protect the missionaries. A very nice letter. The bishop did the decent thing.

Anyway, feelings were very high.

After assuring that the missionary families were as comfortable as possible as they waited in one of the airport hangers for the morning evacuation flights in the military attaché's aircraft. Mitra and I visited the Canadian soldiers who were handling airport communication. By this time, I had become unofficial consul for the Canadians. I took care of them as fellow North Americans. This time, I brought them beer from town. Mitra then said he wanted to get back to Elisabethville. The Swedes were being very slow in organizing a convoy with their APC's. So Mitra said, "Let's go." I had a consulate car, so we got into the car, and I drove as fast as I could, in the night, back to Elisabethville. There were a few shots that went over the top of the car, but we made it.

As we were coming into the outskirts of Elisabethville, where the Gurkhas were holding a position at the strategic traffic circle, Mitra leaned out of the car window, on the passenger side screaming "Hail the Gurkhas" in Gurhali, so that they'd know that we were friends coming into their line and they wouldn't shoot at us.

He had picked up mail for his troops while at the airport. He insisted that we stop to distribute the post and to cheer up his troops. He was a great show man. His troops adored him. We stopped in the middle of the road, and he got out of the car. And he started, very carefully and very slowly, distributing the mail to his soldiers. The Gurkhas adored him. Like many effective military leaders, he was a great showman.

The Katangans saw us stop and began to mortar the position. Mitra went on with his mail call, standing in the middle of the road. Each little Johnny Gurkha would come to him, salute, take his mail, and go back to his foxhole.

Honor demanded that I stand next to Mitra. He had the assurance of an Indian astrologer that he would live to an age of 74 years. I had no such assurance. Nonetheless, to keep face, I stood next to him with mortars going off around us. Thank God, the Katangans were lousy marksmen.

Finally, I got back in the car and drove into the UN positions. I dropped him off at his headquarters, then snuck out a back way and went back to the consulate myself.

Two missionaries had been in the back of the car on our way back from the airport. They were supposed to stay with us to watch after the missions' property and interests. Our return from the airport without protection had unsettled them. Mitra's impromptu mail call had completely unnerved these men of God. When we stopped to distribute mail they slithered out of the back seat into a ditch. They seemed more preoccupied with their asses than with face.

After leaving the UN compound by a back route I took my two ecclesiastical friends to the house of the other vice consul, Whipple, where we were to sleep. The house was empty when we arrived. Tired after a full and exciting day, I went to bed. The missionaries were to sleep in another room. The next morning, I woke up and felt something peculiar on the bed covers. I looked down and there was a note pinned to the blanket under my chin. The note was addressed to me. It informed me that my two companions had decided that the mission property really wasn't in great danger. Therefore, they had decided to leave the country to American vice consuls or mad Gurkha colonels.

Fighting in town continued at a fairly intense level for a couple of weeks. It ended just after Christmas with another inconclusive cease-fire. Western public opinion had again been mobilized to save the Katangan regime.

Q: While the fighting was going on this second time, had you had any contact with the Katangans?

MCNAMARA: I don't recall having any. That doesn't mean that there wasn't any. Hoffacker may have had some contact with the Katangans, but I spent most of my time serving as a go-between with the UN. I crossed the lines every day, went in and talked to the people in the UN and gave them briefings on the situation, as we saw it, on the other side of the lines. I was the outside guy. Whether Hoffacker had any contacts with the official Katangans, I don't know. Probably not. He certainly saw the other consuls and others who did have contacts with the Katangan leaders.

During that second bout of fighting, the Swiss honorary consul suddenly arrived breathlessly at our consulate declaring that the French consul, Lambrouscini, "has just been blessed in front of the synagogue!" He said this in English.

I said, "Blessed?" I had visions of the rabbi holding a ceremony with Lambrouscini on his knees. Finally, I realized the Swiss had confused English and French. What he meant was blessi; ½, wounded. After calming our Swiss colleague, we found that the French consul had been wounded in the arm in front of the synagogue. What he was doing there, God only knows. There were French mercenaries deeply involved on the Katangan side. In fact, they are the ones who orchestrated the capture of the Irish troops in Jadotville in the first bout of fighting. Moreover, they were frequently seen entering or leaving the consulate. Subsequently, I have established that they were there with the actual connivance of the French government. This was also the time when Dag Hammarskjold lost his life as a result of a crash in Northern Rhodesia, near Ndola. He was coming to Ndola to meet with Tshombe. Presumably, they were to discuss an end to the fight. Perhaps, Hammarskjold was hoping to draw Tshombe into a more general discussion of a settlement for the whole Congo crisis. I wasn't personally in Northern Rhodesia and never saw the crash site. However, our attachi; ½ flew over it the next morning, and he said that it looked very much like just a miscalculation by the pilot. Hammarskjold's plane let down too soon, he reckoned, running into big mounds of hard packed earth built up by termites. These are common in that part of Africa. They're 20, 30, or 40 feet high and they're solid. It would be like hitting a concrete block. The attachi; ½ said the crash site and the wreckage was in a direct line with the runway of the airport. Therefore, he concluded that it was pilot error. The cause of the crash has always been controversial. Many assumed sabotage. Others were convinced that the plane was shot down by the Katangan jet trainer that was active at the time. From what I've heard and what I've read about it, I just don't find any of those kinds of theories very convincing. I think it was some sort of pilot error. The exact cause is not clear. However, none of the investigations carried out at the time found any convincing evidence of foul play.

Q: What happened after the second fighting?

MCNAMARA: The second round of fighting ended, again inconclusively, with a cease-fire. Hammarskjold was dead. In charge in Elisabethville of the UN were George Ivan Smith and Brian Urquhart, the two UN officials who had been involved in the kidnapping incident with the Katangans. Their presence in Elisabethville was useful. It was a steadying, reasonable presence, and they weren't given to flights of fancy like Connor Cruise O'Brien. There was still tension, but the Katangans had gotten a good bloody nose by this time. The whole of the modern center of Elisabethville was now firmly in the hands of the UN. A lot of it was badly damaged, however, because of the fighting. The fighting had also resulted in many casualties especially among the African population. A few Europeans were hurt or killed but most civilian casualties were Africans. I think the Katangans were very happy to have this respite. They realized that they weren't, militarily, a match for the UN forces. But they also hadn't surrendered, and they hadn't lost much territory aside from the center of their capital. In any case, they weren't giving up. Mainly as a ploy to buy time, they expressed a willingness to negotiate. This was typical Tshombe.

On a personal level, just after the fighting ended, I decided to go down to Rhodesia to visit my family. So I drove out of Katanga and down (I had all of the various passes and so on to get through the various lines), to Northern Rhodesia on New Year's Eve.

Much of the swollen press corps from Katanga were in Ndola for some R&R. The largest number were English with a few Americans and some other nationalities. They were camped in the principal hotels. Sadly, I couldn't get an airplane to Salisbury on New Year's Eve. All flights were fully booked until the next day.

My journalist friends were having a big bash that night and invited me to join them. Alcohol flowed freely that night. Some of the mercenaries were also there in the dining room of Ndola's biggest hotel. Suddenly, one of the mercenaries (he was the ace of the Katangan air force; he had crashed five of their airplanes) stood up and threw a potted palm at me, shouting, "To hell with JFK and the American government!" The potted palm landed on the table in front of me. Plates were then thrown and fist fights ensued. The police arrived and reasonable calm was restored.

The next day, I went to Salisbury and saw my family. I spent a week with them. On my return from Ndola I brought supplies back in the consulate Jeep. Our larders were running low and there was little food to be had in Elisabethville.

The Katangans were relieved that the cease-fire had taken place. They needed a respite, but they hadn't given up. They were manipulating world opinion. For instance, they played on allegations that Ethiopian troops had committed atrocities-killing an old Belgian woman and her son. These stories were used to manipulate public opinion in Western Europe and in the United States. The Katangans had a representative in the United States, a Belgian. I think his name was Michel Timberlane. He was particularly effective as a propagandist and as a lobbyist.

Q: The name rings a bell.

MCNAMARA: And he was very active.

Q: He had some senators in his pocket, didn't he?

MCNAMARA: Well, Senator Dodd was the most important one. There were stories that money had passed hands, but I have no direct knowledge of anything of that sort.

In any case, Timberlane's activities were having some effect influencing opinion in the United States and in Western Europe. Indeed, western public opinion was forcing the UN to pull its military punches. From a military point of view, the several cease-fires in Katanga were premature and saved the Katangans from much worse defeats.

After the December battles, the situation remained relatively calm for some months. Tension started again to build up some three or four months after the fighting had ended.

At this time, my family and the other families from the consulate had been evacuated to Rhodesia and were staying there on a temporary basis. As relative calm was restored, I began looking for a house, to bring them back. One day Colonel Mitra and I were talking to a Belgian man that we knew who had a house in an area that had been badly damaged. It was just south of the UN headquarters where there had been some of the heaviest fighting. Most houses in the area were damaged. Since the UN controlled the area, Ba-Lubas from the refugee camps had filtered in occupying many of the large villas in what had been one of the town's most affluent suburbs. Sensing Katangan weakness, the Ba-Lubas became aggressive. It was dangerous to go into areas they dominated. They assumed that any white civilian was Belgian and sympathetic towards the Katangans. They had good reason for their animosity. The Ba-Lubas had been butchered by the people from the south Katangan tribes that supported Tshombe. In any case, no South Katangan would have survived five minutes, and neither would any Belgian who wanted to occupy his house in the area north of Elisabethville. At the same time, I was finding it difficult to locate a house. A Belgian told me that, "I'll rent you my house if you will protect the people who are doing the repairs and guarantee the safety of the house after it is fixed up."

Colonel Mitra immediately gave assurance that the house would be protected by his Gurkhas. The Belgian then agreed to repair the house and rent it to me at a reasonable price paid in U.S. dollars. Details were agreed upon and a lease signed.

Mitra got a squad of Gurkhas and we went around to the house. There were about 40 or 50 Ba-Lubas squatting in the house. They had their cooking fires set in the middle of a marble floor in the living room. The house was a mess but had great possibilities, if it could be cleaned and fixed up. Mitra and I went in with the Gurkhas. We asked the Ba-Lubas very politely to leave, but they were reluctant to do so. Finally, Mitra lost patience. He ordered the Gurkhas to fix bayonets. The Ba-Lubas got the message. Then Mitra summoned the chief of the clan. He took out his kukri, a deadly curved knife that all Gurkhas carry. A Gurkha is not supposed to take it out without drawing blood. The only way he can do it, if he doesn't draw somebody else's blood, is to nick his own finger and put blood on the blade. Putting the razor sharp blade next to the Ba-Luba's throat the colonel warned him that, "If anything happened to me he would come back with his Gurkhas, and kill his Malubu interlocutor with his entire entourage. Mitra assured him that his death would be neither quick nor painless. "Get out of this house and don't come back. You are personally responsible for my friend's safety while he lives here. Do not allow anything to happen to him." The poor man gave hasty and repeated assurances of my safety.

The house I rented had been badly damaged during the fighting and during the subsequent occupation by the Ba-Lubas. A small guest house, attached to the larger house, was not damaged. I lived there while they repaired the main house. The Ba-Lubas had only moved out of my new house and its grounds, but they remained in all of the surrounding area. To reassure myself, I took a .38 Smith & Wesson pistol from the consulate. Every morning when I left the house to go to work, there would be people lining the fence watching me. As a silly act of bravura, I occasionally fired a couple of shots in the air warning them not to cross the line into my property. "Colonel Mitra," I said, "will be back with the Gurkhas to fix anybody that I do not get." Whether these melodramatic warnings had any effect, I do not know. In any case, no one ever bothered me.

Ultimately, the house was fixed up, my family came back from Rhodesia, and we occupied the main house. We were the only non-Ba-Lubas who lived in that area for months. Ultimately, the UN cleaned out the area, pushed out the squatters and allowed the people who owned the houses to come in and fix them up. But there were two or three months when my wife, three small girls, and I lived a lonely existence.

Q: How'd your wife feel about that?

MCNAMARA: She's tough. I guess she had a few misgivings at first, but she toughed it out. We survived. It was a nice house and we enjoyed it. The kids lived there and they went to school. The two older ones were in a Catholic girls' school named Marie Josi ½. Most of the students were African, with a few Belgians. My youngest daughter Anne wasn't old enough to go to Marie Josi ½. Instead, she went to a kindergarten in a large school supported by the Belgian government. Most of her classmates were the children of expatriate Belgians living in Katanga.

Q: You mentioned that Hoffacker left. What happened to him?

MCNAMARA: Lew was viewed as being pro-Katangan. He'd sent cables to the Department describing alleged UN atrocities, and other such emotive happenings. I reckon people in Washington and the Ambassador in Kinshasa thought he was too sympathetic to the Katangan point of view. The fact that he was credited with having saved Senator Dodd, made it difficult for them to just yank him out and damage his career. He was a hero with a spread in Life and Time to prove it. No doubt this made it more difficult for his critics to send him off to a career damaging limbo. Nonetheless, he was yanked out of Katanga and sent to Leopoldville as chief of the political section in the embassy.

Hoffacker's replacement in Elisabethville was a very tough guy named Jock Dean. He was a Central European specialist, with no previous African experience. He arrived after the second bout of fighting.

The original Indian brigade was replaced after the December fighting, by another crack Indian unit. A new UN military commander named General Premchon accompanied them. The new brigade was commanded by Reggie Nirona, who ultimately became the Indian Army chief of staff. The brigade major (Chief of Staff) also became Army chief of staff many years later. His name is Sundargee. The new Indian team were first rate. They had three battalions. One was the 1st of the 5th Gurkhas, called the Royal Gurkhas. This battalion had two winners of the Victoria Cross actually serving in the battalion at that time, two senior warrant officers. It is a rank peculiar to the Indian Army. Subidar and subidar major and so on. Gemadar is the lowest of these ranks. A second battalion was from the Raj Puton Rifles. They had been the most decorated battalion in all of the British Empire forces during World War II. The battalion had been decimated and re-raised three times. The third battalion was from the Madras Regiment. The Madrasi aren't as good soldiers as the Raj Puts or the Gurkhas, but this battalion was a good professional outfit.

Q: They're not part of the soldier-class staff.

MCNAMARA: No, they're not a warrior people. But Nirona, who was the brigade commander, was a Madrasi, and he'd won two military crosses in World War II with the Madrasi, and so I think that had something to do with the Madrasi being included in his brigade. It was a good battalion, but they didn't have the same soldierly qualities that the Gurkhas have and the Rajputs, who were first-class soldiers.

The Indian brigade became the central strike force of the UN command. This was the force that was going to do something if anything was going to be done in terms of the Katangans. This was the crack military unit that they really needed to finish the Katangans, if the circumstances, and UN politics, allowed. The rest of the force was made up of Irish and Swedes and Ethiopians.

The tenuous situation rocked on inconclusively, with the UN sitting in the middle of Elisabethville, for about six months as tension again began to build up.

During this period the Katangans organized popular demonstrations against the UN. The most notable was demonstrations by women. They taunted and insulted the Indian soldiers. It was an impressive show of discipline as the soldiers tried to maintain dignity without reacting physically to terrible provocation. The Katangans, of course, had the press there waiting to record any UN "abuse" of poor defenseless women. Indeed, these Katangan ladies were formidable. Such incidents continued to raise the level of tension. The Indians, of course, were biding their time waiting for the right excuse to squash the Katangans and end the comedy.

Ultimately, in June or July, fighting again broke out. This time, the Indians were ready to bring the thing to a conclusion. The Katangans still held the copper-mining centers of Jadotville and Kolwezi. Only the administrative offices of Union Miniere were in Elisabethville. The real economic prize was in Katangan lands. To end the secession and restore the country's most valuable economic asset to central government control the UN had to take control of these towns and their nearby mines and refineries.

When fighting started, I remember going out with Nirona, the Brigadier, to an area where there were mercenaries and some Katangans on a hillside. A battalion of Gurkhas were in the valley below. To get to the Gurkha position a journalist, an Indian armor officer, and I took a captured Jeep down a road, into the area the Gurkhas were in. I didn't know it at the time, but I was told by the Gurkha company commander later that they thought we were mercenaries, because of our civilian clothes. The Indian officer was wearing black coveralls, as most "tankers" do in the Indian army. In any case, we were not recognized as friendly. An order was given to shoot us. The Gurkhas were on both sides of the road all set to open fire, when the company commander took one last look in his glasses at the Jeep and recognized me. Providentially, he rescinded his fire order. Surely, we were within that much of being killed.

Happily ignorant of my close shave I joined the brigade commander at a high point overlooking the ridge where the mercenaries and Katangans had positioned themselves. We were out on an exposed spur. When the Katangans saw us they fired mortars at us. With this little diversion the brigade commander gave the order to the Gurkhas to charge up the hill at our Katangan antagonists. The Gurkhas decided on a kukri charge. They took their kukris out, laid their rifles down, and went up the hill, screaming. The mercenaries and their Katangan friends saw a mass of madmen coming at them with fierce looking knives. Sensibly, they took off. We watched them as they ran off, got into Jeeps and left in great haste.

The Indians then decided to go all the way to Kolwezi. At the consulate, we encouraged them to do so. Under Jock Dean's leadership we were all agreed, that this thing had to be ended. At UN headquarters in Elisabethville and at the American consulate radios were turned off so that the Indian offensive could not be stopped by another weak-kneed cease-fire order coming from New York or Washington.

Q: You're talking about the consul's level.

MCNAMARA: We just decided to turn the radio off. We turned the radio off, and the UN turned the radio off. And the Indians went for Jadotville. They got very little resistance, but there were some bridges blown up, and they had to get across some small rivers. The U.S. had lent a couple of our amphibious APCs to get across the rivers. Anyway, the offensive was mounted on Jadotville. I went into Jadotville with the Indians as I was their only trusted guide. I had visited both Jadotville and Kolwezi with a Katangan military guide. I led Brigade Major Sundarji to the old Katangan headquarters. There, we searched for anything of interest that might have been left behind as the Katangans beat a hasty retreat towards Kolwezi. We found nothing.

After Jadotville, the Indians continued on the road to Kolwezi. Predictably, however, they were finally stopped by yet another cease-fire order from New York. Orders had arrived by aircraft from Leopoldville and radio contact was quickly restored.

Ultimately, the UN got into Kolwezi as well. Tshombe capitulated and the remnants of the Katangan gendarmerie (army) fled into Angola. The UN then was in control of South Katanga, and the Katangan secession was over.

They brought in symbolic units from the national army, as well as a resident minister from the government, named Joseph Ileo, to administer the reintegration of Katanga with the rest of the Congo. A nasty contingent from the Nationale arrived to seek out secessionist, mercenaries and other subversives. I remember one poor Belgian being left tied to a tree for four or five days. His body was covered with cigarette burns. Obviously, he was being tortured. The Surete types grabbed a couple of Americans who happened to be in Katanga. I don't remember quite why they were there. They were being held in the back yard behind Ileo's house. In the middle of the night, to assure that they were not being mistreated, I snuck into the yard next to a campfire. The secret police agents were startled by my sudden appearance. I had come armed with several bottles of beer. This seemed to take the edge off their suspicions. We finally wound up an amicable group around the camp fire-the secret police thugs, the American prisoners and the American Vice-Consul. I suppose this was a dangerous thing to do, but it may have saved our citizens some disagreeable moments. The next day they were released without casualty. We got them out of the country as quickly as possible.

My former wife was pregnant during the third bout of fighting. About a month before she was supposed to deliver, the Belgian doctor who was taking care of her discovered she was going to have twins. She kept getting bigger and bigger and bigger. Finally, he decided that there were more arms and legs than would be normal for one baby. After closer examination, he found that the babies were in a breech position. This was unnerving. Medevacs were then unknown to the Foreign Service. These days, if this happened in the Foreign Service, she would be evacuated to the United States or to a modern hospital elsewhere. In those days, that didn't happen.

As her pregnancy came to term, she woke me one night at about four o'clock in the morning and told me that she thought it was time to go to the hospital. We got ourselves prepared to go to the hospital. One of the consulate secretaries was living in the guest house in our garden. She came over and took care of the older kids while I took my wife to the local hospital. It was run by Belgian nuns. When we got there, the doors were locked tight. We banged on the front door for some minutes. Finally, an old African man peered through the door but refused to open the door. He had been given instructions not to open the door to anybody. I spoke to him in French and Swahili. He didn't seem to understand either language. While I was desperately trying to communicate, the water broke. There I was with a woman just about to have twins, who are supposed to be in breech position, locked out of a hospital.

I was beginning to lose my composure when another man came to the door to investigate the source of the commotion. I explained our problem to him. Miraculously, he understood, let us in and directed us to the maternity ward. I half carried my wife to the maternity wing. When we arrived there was nobody in a long corridor with closed doors. Upon investigating, I found an African lady in a scullery, washing pots and pans. After a hurried explanation she went to find a nun in another part of the hospital. This nun took my wife into a side room. I had to help her up on a bed. The nun examined her, and gasped, "Oh, mon dieu!" She then rushed off without another word. Soon the hospital midwife arrived from the chapel; the nuns were saying early morning prayers. By this time it was about five o'clock in the morning. The no nonsense little Belgian midwife then examined my wife. Turning to me, she presumptuously instructed; "You take one arm, I'll take the other. We've got to get her into the delivery room right away." The two of us half carried her into the delivery room. Incongruously, my ex-wife was still fully clothed with a pocketbook over her arm. We got her onto a delivery table with stirrups. The nun then informed me, "You are going to help me with this delivery."

I asked weakly, "Where is the doctor?"

She replied, "I don't know. We can't find him. No doubt he's patching up wounded some place or other. The time has come," she declared, "we must cope between us. There is no one else to help. When I push and move the babies, you must catch them as they come out."

She told me to get her a stool and put it next to the table. She mounted the stool, she started manipulating my wife's stomach. I was never so frightened. Nonetheless, I knew that if I passed out, the babies would fall on the floor. God, I could see the head of the first baby coming, and I was standing there quivering and waiting to catch. Just at that moment, the doctor arrived. He pushed me gently aside, placed his cigar on the edge of the delivery table, and made a shoestring catch. He handed this slimy, little baby to me, and said, "Wipe that baby off. Put it in the crib." He then made the second catch while the nun continued her manipulations. Thus, we became the relieved parents of two little babies, who were perfect. Other than the bizarre setting, the delivery was normal. The doctor congratulated me, picked up his cigar and departed.

The nun hopped down from her stool instructing me to wheel my ex-wife "to the last room on the right-hand side. Get her into bed."

I gasped, "What!"

"Yes, and take those babies too. We don't have any facilities here to take care of anybody. You're going to have to take care of the babies and your wife."

My ex-wife could not walk, so I put her on a rolling stretcher. When we arrived in a small but clean room, I helped her undress and get into bed. I then returned for the babies. I cleaned them and dressed them, under my ex-wife's instruction.

Each day, I brought food for my ex-wife. The hospital could provide no food for her. In fact, the commander of the Rajput battalion sent over his cook to cook for me and the kids. He also prepared delicious food for her while she was in the hospital. This cook was marvelous. He built a tandoori oven in our backyard. The meals were superb.

During the fighting, the electricity went out, so there was no running water, electricity, or telephones. We cooked the family meals on a Coleman camping stove that our air attaché¹/₂ flew in for us from Leopoldville. Food was in chronic shortage. My whole family existed on military rations for about six or eight months. Our Indian pals would give us rice and potable water that arrived in army trailers called "water mules." They had one that made the rounds of all of their military positions, to give water for the soldiers. They put us on their rounds. We got water once a day from them. We also had a well in the back of the yard. Unfortunately, the water was contaminated. Nonetheless, we could use it for washing, but not for drinking.

Anyway, my ex-wife had the twins. She took care of them in the hospital herself. We had to manage very much on our own. Luckily, both mother and babies were healthy and strong. Surprisingly, we never considered evacuation. We and our kids ate C rations, lived without running water or electricity. Indeed, we even had dinner parties using C rations and whatever else we could scrounge up, only kerosene lanterns and a camp stove to cook on. I even cooled our champagne by lowering it into the well in gunny sacks.

With the third bout of fighting over and the UN and the central government in control, Katangan secession was ended.

Several months after, the last bout of fighting ended. The prime minister in Kinshasa, a man named Adoula, decided that a symbolic gesture was appropriate. The opening of railway traffic was to be a symbol of reunification. The Katangans had blown up the railway bridge on what was called the "Voie Nationale," a railway connecting Katanga with the rest of the Congo. From Katanga, this railway crosses the Congo (Zaire), from Katanga to a tributary of the Congo River where transshipment of copper and other lesser cargoes takes place at Port Franqui. River boats then take the copper to Kinshasa, where it is again transshipped onto a railway for the trip to the port of Matadi at the mouth of the Congo.

Adoula had decided that the reopening of the railway would provide a strong political vehicle for his own ambitions. So he issued instructions to the railway people in Katanga, Union Miniere, to open the railway and organize a special train for the ceremonial trip. The consular corps in Elisabethville was invited to come along as a sort of diplomatic claque. Other dignitaries were invited from various parts of the Congo. On the appointed date, Adoula arrived in Elisabethville. At the time, the principal officer, the consul, was gone, and I was the acting principal officer. Thus, I was designated to act as the U.S. government representative on the rail trip.

With bands playing, we boarded the train in Elisabethville. It was a special train that had been brought out to the Congo a few years earlier for a visit by King Baudouin of Belgium. The cars had been refurbished. A fancy restaurant car and a bar car were included. Everything possible was laid on with no expense spared. Food and drink were flown in from Belgium. It was really organized. The president of the railway company himself came along as a super conductor. He was in charge of the train. Nothing was being left to chance. The head of the giant copper company, Union Miniere, also joined us. These were the people who really ran the country's economy.

Adoula declared that, "This is very serious political business, and no wives will be brought along." Some poor journalist showed up with his wife. She got on the train. As we left Elisabethville, she was found and chucked off at the first stop. No women; this was serious business in the Congo. Initially, each time we came across three or four people standing along the rail line, they stopped, and the prime minister got out and made a speech.

As the train went further into the second and third day, women were taken aboard but were hidden from most of the passengers. Most of the Congolese elite, in those days, seemed incapable of abstinence from sex for more than 24 hours.

The relative austere decorum lasted until we arrived in Luluabourg (now Kananga), the principal town in the middle of the Kasai. When we arrived, the town was in fete. A military parade was organized. That evening, a huge reception and dinner were held that went on all night long. My consular colleagues and I got back to the train in the wee hours of the morning. We'd gone to the dinner and the reception, and then we went and had some more drinks with the local UN representative, a Chilean whom I had known in Elisabethville. We returned to the train at about four or five in the morning. In the station, it looked as though every prostitute in Luluabourg was being loaded on the train. That was the end of serious political business. From that point on, there were big mamas all over the train. Adoula himself never came out of his private carriage until we arrived in Port Franqui two days later.

Our train would arrive in a station, the band would get out and play. On one occasion, the Belgian consul general, who was pissed to the ears, decided to review the guard of honor as no Congolese official was interested or capable of bestirring himself. The crowd were chanting "Hooray for Tshombe!" Somehow they thought Tshombe had arrived. When the Belgian went out to review the troops, the crowd began to chant, "Viva le roi!" There appeared to have been a serious breakdown in communications and our Congolese hosts did nothing to correct them.

Anyway, Adoula never stuck his nose outside the train again until we arrived at our destination. I remember being bored. We were on the train for a whole week. The Greek consul, who was with us, was very prissy (he was a pain in the ass, to be absolutely frank). The British vice consul and I were good friends. He was also, at this point, the acting consul for the British. His name was Terrence Grady. We met again later in Gabon where he was the British ambassador and I was the American ambassador. We were sharing a compartment on the train. We also became friendly with a Belgian officer who was an aide-de-camp to a senior Congolese Army colonel.

After four or five days on the train, we were bored. Sitting in the bar car one afternoon-the ladies had taken over the car-a large drunk lady asked me whether I would like to take her to my compartment? She thought it would be more comfortable there. I opined, "That sounds very interesting. Would you join me there in five minutes?" I then gave the lady the number of the compartment occupied by the Greek consul. Our Greek colleague almost never left his compartment. He was frightened of the company in the rest of the train.

I returned to my own car to alert my pals of the imminent arrival of the lady at the Greek's door. When she got to the door, I got behind her and pushed her in, and closed the door and locked it from the outside. Inside, she went after the Greek who climbed into the upper bunk to escape the lady's amorous attentions. No doubt, he looked prosperous, with money to pay for her charms. We left her there for some twenty minutes before opening the door and inducing her departure with a handful of francs. The Greek never spoke to any of us again.

Finally, we arrived at our destination, Port Francqui, which was the terminus of the railway, and the transshipment point from rail to river barge. The train was to return to Elisabethville. None of us could stomach another week of this lunacy. We decided to detrain and find our way back to Elisabethville after festivities in Port Francqui. We had done our duty. The Union Miniere director informed us that an airplane would be coming to pick him up. He offered to take us with him. With light hearts our little consular band abandoned the train.

To our chagrin, the airplane came, but wasn't big enough to take everyone. Some of our traveling companions were older. I was fairly young, at that time, as was Terrence Grady. We volunteered to stay behind on the promise from the Union Miniere man that an airplane would come back and pick us up. Our brave party of stay behinds consisted of the Belgian consul general, the British consul, the American consul, and Mr. Ileo, Chef de Cabinet. The latter was a charming, intelligent young man whom we all liked and respected. The four of us volunteered to stay and wait for the next airplane. Little did we know that the promise to send another aircraft would not be honored. Out of sight, out of mind.

We went into town, and were taken to the best local hotel. After a warm greeting from the drunken reception staff, we went to our rooms. I was to share a room with the British consul. Terrence and I also shared a compartment on the train. We were good friends. After a dirty afternoon, we asked for some water for washing. The plumbing was not working. A tipsy maid picked up a bucket and went outside where she turned a tap on the outside of the hotel filling the bucket with dark brown liquid that was only just viscous. This, she proclaimed, was our washing water. Terrence and I distributed it evenly over ourselves, taking on a darker shade in the process. We then asked for drinking water. The manager smiled a happy, agreeable grin and produced another pitcher of brown liquid. When asked whether it was safe to drink, he offered a bottle of whiskey, made in the Congo, to purify our "water." "That will kill anything," he assured. Made in Kinshasa, Old Granddad or something. Old Grand Uncle, perhaps.

Anyway, that's what we had to brush our teeth with.

No airplane arrived that day so we prepared to stay the night. We had dinner at the hotel, by candlelight. There was no electricity. Trying to be hospitable, our host asked what we would like as an aperitif? Our Belgian colleague, who liked his drink, eagerly requested whiskey. I tried to warn him against it for I was sure that he would be offered the made-in-the-Congo potion of very uncertain quality. "Don't drink that. You'll kill yourself. Drink beer," I pleaded. Congolese beer was still good and safe. The rest of us drank beer, but he insisted on whiskey. With relish he downed half a glass of the Congo's finest. It went down, hit bottom, and then everything in his stomach came up like a fire hose. That ended our alcoholic adventure. A lady arrived with a large cooked fish, that overlapped a platter. Canned peas had been poured on the fish. This was to be dinner; a limited but acceptable menu. As she approached our table, she staggered, lost balance and dropped the fish on the Belgian consul's head. At this point, he was just recovering from his whiskey experience. I still see him with the fish draped across his head and shoulders. A pea rested on the end of his long nose. We plucked the fish off him, dusted it off, and ate it. Clearly, we were in no position to be too concerned with hygienic problems.

After dinner, the local army commander came to take us for a night out. He commanded the local battalion that, a year earlier, had eaten a platoon of Ghanaian troops with their British officers. The Ghanaians were serving with the UN forces when they came into conflict with the Congolese. He seemed an agreeable fellow when we met him. We all boarded cars for the drive to a local nightclub. It was the only place in town with electricity. They had their own generator. Later, I learned that it was owned by the colonel and some other local political figures. The club was crowded when we entered. Our host, the colonel, went to a table next to the dance floor, and he drew his sword out. People were sitting around the table with no apparent regard for their safety, he cleared the table with the flat of his sword, bottles and glasses flew every which way. Startled people sitting at the table fell over backwards trying to get away from the vicious swipes of the saber. Very smartly, we had the best table in the house. Terrence and I were still in shock when the colonel graciously offered us seats, still warm from their previous occupants. Sitting next to me he affably inquired, "Do you wish to dance?" Somebody had told him that I liked dancing. I replied in the affirmative thinking it would not be politic to say no. He might even consider my declining as a breach of protocol. Reacting to my mumbled reply, he grabbed a woman from another table, someone's wife, sweetheart or whatever, dragged her to our table and ordered, "Dance with him." Not wishing to incur the colonel's displeasure, I danced the lady to the other side of the crowded floor whispering that she should make her exit quickly. I found many willing partners and danced the evening away. Sometime early in the morning we were taken back to our hotel traveling at high speed on the dark, unpaved streets. I was very pleased to see our hotel again despite my earlier bizarre experiences.

Q: Did you finally get a plane and get the hell out of that town?

MCNAMARA: Not yet! When we returned from the nightclub, the British consul and I went to our room. We were both tired and welcomed any kind of bed that did not rock and jolt, after our week aboard a train. I was in the bathroom when, suddenly, I heard an awful scream. We couldn't see much, as it was pitch dark. We did have a lantern, but it didn't give much light. The twin beds had white mosquito-netting canopies over them, further obscuring the beds themselves. As I rushed back into the bedroom, I found Terrence thrashing about in his bed, now enmeshed in the mosquito netting. With some difficulty, I extracted him from the bed to find a very frightened lady had been in the bed awaiting our return. Her sister in labor was in the other bed. The good colonel was thinking of us all the time. After calming ourselves, we dismissed the girls with a fistful of francs. In those pre-AIDS days there was plenty of gonorrhea and syphilis around, especially in those little port towns on the Congo. Neither of us was keen on screwing around with the local prostitutes.

The next day, we again went to the airport to await our promised aircraft. We waited and waited and waited. And while we were waiting, we were joined by an interesting gentleman who turned out to be a minister in the provincial government at Port Francqui. Shortly after we became acquainted, he pulled me aside offering a sackful of things that looked like little pieces of glass. He claimed they were diamonds. Intent on making a deal with me, the Minister proposed that I become his sales distributor. "Just send me things like radios and record players and I'll send you packages of diamonds in return. Here is a package as my first consignment." One of our party had a small portable radio. The Minister offered his sack of diamonds for it. I didn't know whether they were genuine diamonds or not. I do know that diamonds are mined near Port Francqui. I declined the Minister's kind offer, as did my colleagues.

Ultimately, an airplane did arrive. It was not sent, however, by the friendly Union Miniere Director. Anyway, we got on the airplane, and returned to Elisabethville.

At about the same time, the American government was searching for ways to assure the continued unity of the Congo. They were looking for instruments to encourage the cohesion of the Congo. At the time, I was still in charge of the consulate when two young gentlemen from Washington arrived. One was Ed Streator, who ultimately became our ambassador at the EEC. The other was Crawford Young, who was working on contract with the State Department but was regularly employed teaching in Wisconsin. Since that time, he had become one of President Mobutu's most severe critics. Shortly after their arrival, the two asked me whether I thought that the national army was a viable instrument that could be used to further national unity?

At first I thought they were joking. Such a proposition was absurd. When I realized they were indeed serious, I told them that the best thing that could be done for the country would be to disarm and disband the national army. It was the source of much of the country's woes and was non-recuperative. The army had mutinied. It specialized in rape and pillage. It was undisciplined and out of control. In short, the army was the most dangerous element in the society. They were an armed rabble with just enough organization to make them dangerous. I said, "Get rid of them and form an entirely new army. Once an army has mutinied like this and gone through such experiences, there's no recouping them. Just get rid of them and start over again, forming a rural constabulary with separate urban police forces for the cities. That's what the Congo really needs. There are no credible external threats. In any case, the present army would be useless against any serious military force." My two apprentice sorcerers didn't agree with that assessment.

I made the assessment on the basis of my acquaintanceship with the Congolese that I had seen and the things that had occurred. Their plan, I felt, could only lead to disaster. Unfortunately, history has proven my warning to have been prophetic. Actually, it took no great genius to make them-only a little experience in the Congo and some common sense. Sadly, our sorcerers were listened to in Washington. Their recommendation led to our backing of Mobutu and thirty years of suffering and waste in the Congo.

The Mobutu problem still hasn't gone away. The army that preys on its citizens is still there, and it remains as big a problem as it was in 1963. We might have avoided that problem if we had disbanded the army. Perhaps a new army would have become just as corrupt and undisciplined. I don't know for sure. But the price of not disbanding the old army is now clear for all to see.

Q: But, anyway, this was part of our effort. What else happened while you were there?

MCNAMARA: Well, let me see if I can think of any other interesting tidbits.

Q: After all these attacks and all that, did you get much support from the embassy?

MCNAMARA: The embassy in Kinshasa?

Q: Yes.

MCNAMARA: Well, the air attaché¹/₂ flew in C rations for us and things of that sort. We got support in a material sense. And every now and then they'd send up people to look into what we were doing. And, of course, whenever there was fighting, the Army attaché¹/₂ would rush up and try to monitor what was going on. The Army attaché¹/₂ was certainly there during the last bout of fighting.

Q: You left there when?

MCNAMARA: I left Elisabethville in October, 1963. I am reasonably certain of the timing because I arrived in Washington just before President Kennedy's death.

Q: Which was November.

MCNAMARA: When I came back, I didn't realize that I was psychologically rocky as I must have been. I certainly was suffering battle fatigue after two years in that dangerous, unpredictable place. I'd gone through two years of drunks sticking loaded guns in my face. An inadvertent stumble could have blown my head off. Living in a hostile city, crossing opposing lines during combat, evacuating people, and nearly being killed by my own friends had all taken toll.

People in State Department Personnel, thinking they were doing me a favor, had assigned me to university labor training, and then as assistant labor attaché in Paris. I think people really thought that this was what I would like and that it would be a nice reward for my service in Katanga. Unfortunately, when I was in Rhodesia, I had mentioned in an efficiency report that I would like to have labor training. I'd gotten interested in the labor movement in Rhodesia when I was there, and found it fascinating. So I guess they thought that this was what I wanted. In any case, that's the assignment I got.

When I got back, I said, "No, I don't want to be a labor reporter. I don't want to take labor training. That's not what I want to do. It's too specialized."

A lady in Personnel who talked to me said, well, you must take the training. You are scheduled to go to that course. You're supposed to report the next week.

I said, "No, I'm not going to go."

She insisted, but I kept saying, "No, I won't go."

We were at an impasse. She then called in Frank Carlucci, who was then working in personnel. We'd been in the Congo at the same time and were friends. He tried to talk me into taking the course, I continued to resist.

Mac Godley, who was the country director for the Congo, said, "Well, why didn't you let us know earlier? We would have gotten you an assignment you would have liked. But we thought this was something you wanted."

Finally, people came to the conclusion that I "needed a rest." They let me go off on leave for a couple of months, and then assigned me to something called the mid-career course.

I came back and rented a house in Cleveland Park, in D.C. It was pleasant. We put the kids in a good neighborhood grammar school called Eaton School. Sadly, it is now closed. The area was nice in those days and good for the children. We decompressed there and enjoyed life in Washington for about six or eight months.

I started my course in January '64. In March, I got a call from the assistant secretary in the Public Affairs Bureau. I don't remember her name, but she told me that I was being assigned to her, and that I was going to make speeches on the Foreign Service around the country. She told me, "I think you will be perfect for the role." I had instant visions of going to women's clubs all over middle America, making speeches on how wonderful the Foreign Service was. I gulped back my panic declaring, "No, I'm not your man."

And she said, with a harder edge to her voice, "Oh, yes, you are."

We ended our conversation with her insisting, "You will be here on Monday morning. Moreover, you will do what I tell you to do."

By this time, I had recovered my psychological equilibrium. I simply did not want to be a public relations flack-the hero returned from serving his country under the harshest conditions in the dark heart of Africa.

In search of help, I turned to the African Personnel Section. Charlie Whitehouse was then head of African Personnel. Earlier, Charlie had worked on the Congo and knew me. I went to him and said, "Charlie, you've got to get me out of this. I'll go anyplace. I'll do anything. You just say what it is, and I'll do it. I've really got to get out of the clutches of this lady."

"Okay," he said, "but you will have to go anyplace I tell you to go, with no complaints."

I gave him my word that I would march off with no complaints. I knew I would have no further indulgence from the system. I'd already refused the assistant labor attaché's ½ assignment. Charlie was prepared to be understanding, but he wasn't going to go too far. In those days, people in personnel did not have to be persuasive. They issued orders and Foreign Service officers obeyed. Because I had performed well in Katanga, people were willing to be somewhat lenient but there were limits. And the limits were much more constrained then than they are now.

Charlie got me out of the assignment, but told me I had to take whatever assignment he gave me.

And so I gratefully accepted Charlie's Faustian deal. A day or two later, Charlie called to tell me that he wanted me to go to Tanzania as the economic officer. That didn't sound so bad to me. I said, "Sure. No problem." This was not a great assignment, but it did not seem nearly as bad as I had feared it might be. My relief was short lived. When word got out that I was going to Tanzania, friends and acquaintances came to commiserate with me. They told me that, "The new ambassador in Dar es Salaam will have you for breakfast. His name is Bill Leonhart. He's just fired the DCM, the economic officer, the AID director, and the PAO." He cleaned house in the mission. They predicted, "You won't last. Your career is over in the Foreign Service. Forget it. You go out there, and you'll be back in three or four months. He was a holy terror in Tokyo, where he was the DCM, and he's even worse as ambassador."

Resigned to my fate, I went to Tanzania, got along famously with Leonhart. In fact, he and I became good friends. Before leaving post he recommended me for a meritorious honors award.

Q: You never know. You were in Tanzania from when to when?

MCNAMARA: I went to Tanzania in April 1964. I was there until just before Christmas of 1966. So, in other words, I had almost three years.

Q: What was the situation like when you were there?

MCNAMARA: I got there just a few months after the revolution in Zanzibar and the army mutinies in East Africa, including Tanzania. The revolution in Zanzibar began on January 12, 1964. On January 20, the East African armies mutinied. The British sent troops in to put down the mutinies. In Tanzania, in Dar es Salaam, they sent British Marine commandos who ended the mutiny very smartly.

When I arrived, the situation in the country was still very tense. Nyerere had hidden during the army mutiny. He had lost some face by disappearing, but he had survived. Marxists had taken control of Zanzibar. This made people nervous, including Nyerere. Shortly after my arrival, Nyerere decided that he would take a calculated risk (at least this was what he told our ambassador) in unifying the two countries, Tanganyika and Zanzibar. He took the Marxist regime into the body politic of Tanganyika hoping that the poison would be diluted in the larger body.

I hadn't been there for more than six or eight months, when the U.S. was accused of plotting against the Zanzibar "revolutionary" authorities. Our DCM and our Consul in Zanzibar were declared persona non grata.

Q: That was Frank Carlucci, wasn't it?

MCNAMARA: Frank Carlucci was the consul in Zanzibar, and Bob Gordon, who unfortunately became blind, and became the ambassador to Mauritius, was the DCM.

It now appears that the two of them had a telephone conversation about the upcoming first anniversary of the coup in Zanzibar. They discussed the nature and level of the congratulations message to be sent by the United States to the government in Zanzibar. One or the other, and I don't remember which one now, used unfortunate vocabulary like "We'll need more ammunition" in relation to the bureaucratic justification for a message to be sent from the President or the Vice-President to the "President" of Zanzibar.

Such Americanisms that might seem innocuous to another American lent themselves to misinterpretation, when heard by already suspicious East Africans. Moreover, it appears that a recording of the conversation may have been doctored by technically competent enemies of the U.S., such as the East Germans who were then employed as security advisors in Zanzibar.

Whatever happened, many Tanzanians were convinced that we were plotting a counter-coup in Zanzibar. To make matters worse, it wasn't just people who were antagonistic towards the United States who were convinced that the counter-coup plotting was genuine. A friend who was well disposed toward the U.S. confided to me that he had heard the tape (they wouldn't play it for us), and he was convinced that we really were up to something. I assured him, no, that we weren't. But he said, "Well, it certainly sounded convincing on the tape."

Later on, we heard that there were two Israeli security agents who had heard the tape. One of them was convinced that it was genuine. The other felt that it was a doctored tape.

There were East Germans in the security apparatus in Zanzibar. It may well be that they taped the conversation and did a professional job in doctoring it. Under the circumstances, our people were crazy to talk to one another on the open telephone lines between Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam. We knew there were East Germans, Cubans and Russians on the island with the closest relations with the Zanzibaris.

Anyway, Carlucci and Gordon were thrown out, the ambassador went back to Washington on consultations, and a political officer and I were left in charge of the embassy.

Q: Who was the political officer?

MCNAMARA: Chris Pappas, who died some years later. The ambassador, when he left, said, "Well, you guys are in charge." He didn't say you are in charge, or you are in charge, he said, "you guys." We were good friends and we worked together as a team in the ambiguity in the ambassador's parting instructions caused no problems. Chris was one grade higher than I was, so he was technically the chargé d'affaires. But, anyway, it was fine, and we carried on for about two or three months while the ambassador was gone.

In that period, there was a good deal of anti-American animosity. The foreign minister held a press conference to publically denounce us. At the press conference, the Algerian ambassador, a man named Djoudi, who is now fairly prominent in their Ministry of Foreign Affairs, interpreted for the Minister for the French-speaking press. This was an unusual role for a third country diplomat. Djoudi did not like the United States. He had been a student at Bowdoin College in Maine during the Algerian revolution against the French. For some reason, he had developed a great dislike for America and Americans. He encouraged the Tanzanian Foreign Minister, Oscar Kambona, in his own anti-Americanism. Ironically, Kambona wound up in California as a political refugee after being accused of plotting against Nyerere.

Relations between Tanzania and the U.S. were troubled but were never broken completely. Julius Nyerere, I think, was convinced that we were up to something, but did not wish to break with us. Internally, Tanzania was moving in a radical direction. Nyerere was a long-time Fabian Socialist. He visited China and decided that Mao's China was a great model for the mobilization and development of a peasant society. Zhou En-lai came to Dar es Salaam when I was there. I remember seeing him riding down the street, sitting with Nyerere on the back of an old Rolls Royce convertible. The car must have been inherited from some long gone colonial governor.

Tension in our relations persisted for some time. Nonetheless, the ambassador returned and served out his term there. Relations between the U.S. and Tanzania were never again as warm as they had been in the years just after independence. Nyerere continued to pursue his nationalization of the economy, which ultimately turned to disaster.

Q: How did we view what he was doing at the time? You were the economic officer. How did you view Nyerere at that time?

MCNAMARA: Initially, I had great illusions, like a lot of Americans, about Nyerere himself. The ambassador and most of our people thought that Nyerere himself was a great man, that he was a great thinker, that he was a Socialist, but he was certainly not a Marxist.

He had a concept of self help village that he called Ujamaa. They were not quite rural communes, but the Chinese influence was obvious. The rural population in most of Tanzania was spread out living on their own shambas, their little farms. His idea was to bring them together in small villages where central services would be provided, e.g., medical services, public works, etc.

Q: Somebody I interviewed said there was a British Socialist lady who came out and was advisor to him for many years.

MCNAMARA: Oh, Yes. Her name is Joan Wickham. She was his mistress, closest confidante, and devoted acolyte. She served as secretary and principal speech writer. She stayed with him for many years. God knows whether she's dead now or not, but if she's still alive, I assume she's still someplace in Tanzania.

Nyerere lost my sympathy (because I really did have a high regard for him) when he forced the people into Ujamaa villages. He said he would never use force, that he would try to convince people to do these things. But when they balked, he resorted to the police forcing them into collective Ujamaa villages. In doing so, he really did great harm and caused much suffering amongst certain parts of the rural population.

For instance, in the north of Tanzania, on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro, there was one of the oldest cooperatives in Africa. It was formed by the Chagga people. The Chagga had a thriving cooperative based on the marketing of their excellent coffee. It was high-quality coffee, and it brought in a good price to the growers. Once the Chagga growers were forced off their shambas and into central villages, they lost incentive. Of more economic importance, marketing of the crops was done by the government. The control of the marketing was taken over by the government, and the people were taken off their shambas, collectivized, and put in these damned villages. So he took the incentive of the smallholder away, the private individual working and living on his own land. He destroyed the cooperative, which was doing business pretty well. It may not have been perfect, but it was doing business pretty well, and had been for a long time. In the south, the same thing happened with a tea-growing cooperative among the Nyakyusa tribe.

And, of course, the awful social disruption. Nyerere disrupted the social pattern of the people. Traditionally, that's not the kind of life they lived. It caused a great hardship.

He pursued nationalization throughout the economy. Sisal plantations were taken over from Greek and Asian owners. The banks were nationalized. Finally, he even went so far as to "nationalize" houses. I understand that people were not allowed to own more than two houses.

He ruined the economy of the country. It was not a strong economy to begin with, very fragile, it's a poor country, but what they did have going for them was pretty much disrupted and destroyed by these social experiments that were initiated by Nyerere.

Ultimately, of course, he sent troops into Uganda. And the troops brought back some bad habits from Uganda. Corruption became rife. His party, TANU (Tanganyikan African National Union), became an instrument of corruption and of oppression of the people.

The people who had bankrolled much of Nyerere's follies and who bear major responsibility, along with Nyerere himself, are the Nordics: the Swedes, the Norwegians, and the Danes. Millions were poured into ill-considered socio-economic experiments.

Q: While you were there, '64 through '66...

MCNAMARA: A lot of this happened subsequently.

Q: What were American interests there?

MCNAMARA: The geographic location on the east coast of Africa, the Indian Ocean coast, was of some strategic interest. It was just north of the Mozambique Channel. The war of liberation going on in Mozambique was being supplied and run from Dar es Salaam. Frelimo (Frente de Liberacao de Mocambique) had its headquarters in Dar es Salaam. Also, Dar was the liberation capital of Africa. The African Liberation Committee, which was the OAU's (Organization of African Unity) liberation instrument, was located in Dar es Salaam. It funneled funds and equipment to various liberation groups. The South Africans were there, both ANC (African National Congress) and PAC (Pan-African Congress). The Zimbabweans, the Zambians, the Angolans, the Mozambicans were there. The whole southern African liberation movement had either its headquarters or strong representation present there. So, obviously, that was a major interest.

Q: While you were there, what were our instructions as far as dealing with these various African nationalistic movements?

MCNAMARA: We were to maintain discreet, regular contact with them.

There were American funds going into the Mozambique Institute, for instance. The Mozambique Institute provided schooling for Mozambique refugees. I'm sure that Eduardo Mondlane, who was the head of Frelimo at the time, must have been getting money from us, on a covert basis.

He was killed, by the way, shortly after I left Dar es Salaam. He lived just down the beach from me. He received a book in the mail, opened the book, and it blew up in his face and killed him. To this day, as far as I know, nobody is sure where the book came from; whether it was from enemies in his own organization or from the Portuguese.

I most strongly suspect, people from within his own organization. He certainly had enemies within Frelimo. One night, a Swiss American, who managed the local branch of a bank with American interests, asked me to help him. Mondlane was away, and his wife had gotten a threat from some people in Frelimo, saying that they were going to come and kill her and her children. For safety, the bank manager and I took her to stay in the bank manager's house. I don't know where the warning came from. I remember Nairobi was mentioned. It was obvious, however, that the threat was not Portuguese. It was from within Frelimo. There were obvious problems within the leadership, but I don't know who the people opposed to Mondlane were.

Q: How active were the Soviets?

MCNAMARA: Very active.

Q: Did we feel that the Soviets were going to take over, or did we feel that Nyerere wouldn't let them take over completely?

MCNAMARA: Well, we feared of their influence. We thought Nyerere presented a barrier to this, but we couldn't be sure. We saw him as a non-Marxist Socialist who wasn't perfect, but was certainly better than a person under Soviet influence. Nyerere was the darling of liberals throughout the Western world. He was looked on as a good alternative to Marxists. It may have been foolish on their part, it may have been unrealistic, but it was there. In actual fact, Nyerere was more influenced by the Chinese than by the Soviets.

Q: This was also probably really within the State Department, too, then.

MCNAMARA: There was a strong current of that in the State Department, and there was a strong current of it among liberals in the United States. When he came to the United States on visits, he was lionized. I remember seeing him in Washington before I went to Tanzania. His speeches were crowded. Organizations like the Ford Foundation were among his strongest supporters.

Q: Just to get a little feel for the time, while you were there, did you feel, as an economic officer, or working when the ambassador was away, that you were sort of pulling your punches as far as reporting on what was happening in the country?

MCNAMARA: The real changes didn't take place while I was there. The real changes took place just after I left, after the Arusha Declaration of February 1967. That's when Ujamaa was implemented. As I look back now, you could see a lot of this coming. They talked about it, but the real changes in the economy didn't take place until after 1967. We certainly reported everything that went on. I don't think we really understood or took seriously his determination to go as far as he did. As far as pulling punches, I do feel now that we, too often, gave Nyerere the benefit of the doubt.

Q: You left there when?

MCNAMARA: In 1966, just before Christmas.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point. Let's quickly talk about what we'll talk about the next time

MCNAMARA: All right.

Q: Where did you go after that?

MCNAMARA: I went to the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk. Then I went back to Zambia for a few months as the acting DCM. Then, for two weeks, I was on the South African Desk. In good conscience, I could not abide our South African policy, which was to quietly acquiesce in apartheid.

Q: Then you went to Vietnam. This was when?

MCNAMARA: In January 1968, just before Tet.

Q: Okay, we'll pick it up there.

Today is the 24th of May, 1993, and this is a continuing interview with Terry McNamara. Terry, we have you going to Vietnam in 1968. How did that assignment come about?

MCNAMARA: Well, Stu, it came about in a peculiar way. I had been to the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk for six months in the first half of 1967. When I finished my course, I got a TDY assignment to Zambia as the acting DCM, to take the place of Bill Edmondson. His wife fell sick and had to be medevaced. I had just come out of Dar es Salaam, where I'd been for almost three years. I had also served in Salisbury working on Zambia (Northern Rhodesia). I was a natural candidate to replace Bill. I was in Zambia for about three to four months as the acting DCM.

Orders came while I was in Zambia, assigning me to the South African Desk. I did not want to go and work on South Africa. I had just come from Dar es Salaam and Lusaka where I had regular contact with various liberation groups. Simply put, I did not agree with our policy towards South Africa and did not think I could loyally support it working directly on South Africa.

Q: One of the so-called front-line states.

MCNAMARA: Yes. Dar es Salaam had the headquarters for the African Liberation Committee, a committee of the Organization of African Unity devoted to supporting the liberation of southern Africa. Also, I guess...South Africa. I felt we were acquiescent towards apartheid in South Africa. I asked to have my assignment changed, but was told that I was assigned to the South Africa Desk, and that was that. I came back to the Department and went to work on the South African Desk as the economist for southern Africa, under a man named White, a very fine Foreign Service officer who later became the ambassador in Senegal.

The first business that came up after my arrival was the renewal of the sugar quota for South Africa. I took a contrarian view writing a paper recommending that the quota be taken away from South Africa. The old timers on the desk were horrified. They thought this was a dreadful thing to do. White, who was the country director, said that he supported my view. He liked having a difference of view in his office. Even when he did not, or could not, agree, he liked having different viewpoints aired. Before my arrival, everyone on the Desk seemed quiet content with the acquiescent policy that we were pursuing.

Anyway, the decision on the quota went against my recommendation. They renewed the sugar quota. I could see that this wasn't a place where I was going to really be comfortable. Clearly, I would have little influence as Henry Kissinger had already decided on a policy of "benign neglect" towards South Africa. I asked White if he would support me in asking for another assignment? "I'd like to have you here, but if you don't feel comfortable, I understand it, and I'll support you for an assignment elsewhere in Africa," White kindly replied.

At the time, my former ambassador in Dar es Salaam, Bill Leonhart, was in the White House, working on Vietnam. I told him that I'd really like to go to Vietnam. In part it had to do with getting away from South Africa, but in part also it was something that was going on, it was something happening, it was the great historic event of our time. I wanted to be part of it-to see it up close.

Q: Yes, this was what was known as seeing the elephant. I did the same thing.

MCNAMARA: This was the historic event of the time, and I didn't want to be sitting in a backwater, watching it from a great distance. And at that point, Africa was fast becoming a backwater. Leonhart said, "Right, I'll fix it. We need activists in Vietnam." It was a Friday that I talked to him. On Monday morning, he said, "Report to the Vietnam Training Center at FSI." He made the necessary call to Personnel. When they heard that the White House was asking for me, my assignment was changed and I was on my way to Vietnam.

That is how it happened. I went to the Vietnam Training Center for six weeks and departed for Vietnam late in 1967.

During the training course, we went to play war games in Cacapon, West Virginia, in a State park. There was snow on the ground; it couldn't have been further from what we would encounter in Vietnam. Our instructors included a former missionary who'd been in China and Indochina in the old days. We were given a scenario for a war game. I conspired with some of my pals to subvert the thing by acting as though I were on one side, while in fact supporting the other. This screwed up the planned solution. After the war game was over, the born-again Christian gentleman accused me of lacking moral fiber. I had been "duplicitous," he indignantly accused. When I asked whether the Viet Cong might also be duplicitous who might not always tell the truth, the man of God turned his back on me. My point seemed to be beyond his understanding. Sadly, these were the kind of people that were preparing us to go to Vietnam.

Q: That was obviously part of the problem.

MCNAMARA: Anyway, I spent Christmas in Hawaii, with my daughters and arrived in Saigon on the last day of '67 or the first day of '68. Holiday celebrations had slowed up the processing and assignment machinery. As a result, there were quite a few of us awaiting provincial assignments in Saigon. Our orientation began with briefings given in a theater in the Rex Hotel in central Saigon.

Q: Yes, it was an officers' billet in the Hotel Rex.

MCNAMARA: I think they also used the theater for the press briefings. During our orientation period, we were assigned rooms in hotels in the center of town that had been rented by USAID. It was interesting to see Saigon on the eve of Tet. Nguyen Hue Street, a wide boulevard in the center of town, was full of flowers and flowering trees being sold to celebrate Tet. There was a festive spirit like the before-Christmas atmosphere in the United States. One could sense a feeling of optimism.

The people who briefed us exuded optimism. They seemed to think that a corner had been turned in the war and that things were going very well. I don't remember anyone actually mentioning a light at the end of the tunnel, but Westmoreland had just done so before Congress. It did appear, from the external signs visible to a complete newcomer, that things were going well and that people were optimistic, both the Vietnamese and the Americans. Preparations for Tet were going forward and the mood seemed to be one of happy anticipation.

I went to my briefing classes and awaited my assignment. Technically, I was on loan to USAID to work in the joint field advisory program called CORDS (Civil Operations for Rural Development). CORDS was largely military, but had a serious civilian component. It had only recently been formed to take in all of the provincial advisors, both military and civilian, and was responsible to MACV (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam). It had a directorate in MACV.

Q: MACV being the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam.

MCNAMARA: Right! Westmoreland was the chief of MACV, as well as being commander of all U.S. forces in Vietnam. Robert Komer, who had been in the White House, had just been named as the chief of CORDS. A civilian with a CIA background, he was a deputy to Westmoreland. The top leadership was mainly civilian. At the province level the leadership was split, military-civilian. If the Province senior advisor was military, then his deputy would be civilian. If the PSA was civilian chief, his deputy would be military. The theory was that our advisory effort should speak with one voice. In any case, at the provincial level, it was not easy to separate military from civilian aspects of the war. The VC were fighting a "revolutionary war" where such fine distinctions were meaningless. Unbeknownst to most of us, disaster was about to strike while we happily visited restaurants and watched the Vietnamese middle class prepare for their great annual celebration. On the eve of Tet suddenly the atmosphere changed. Security officers came to our hotel with a warning that we were not to go out that night. The whole atmosphere changed quickly, and where the markets had been overflowing in Nguyen Hue Street and elsewhere in Saigon, suddenly there were very few people on the streets. We were told by American security officers that we should get off the streets, stay in the hotel that night, and not go out on the streets at all. There was usually a curfew at about ten o'clock, I think, but they lowered the curfew to six or seven that night, to keep people indoors.

In the middle of the night, I was awakened by explosions. Other people in the hotel told me that there had been attacks by the Viet Cong in the city. We went up to the hotel roof, where we could hear the crunch of explosions and see tracers and flares lighting up the sky. The sounds indicated that some intense fighting was taking place nearby.

The next morning, there was smoke in the air in the direction of our embassy, a few blocks north of the hotel district where we were staying. There was much military activity all around the town. Helicopter gun ships were buzzing over the town firing at targets in the town itself. We started hearing reports on the radio that the embassy had been attacked by sappers who had gotten inside the wall.

By noontime, things had quieted down in the center of town. The shooting and the fighting at the embassy had ended. That afternoon, I walked up to the embassy. Everybody was very tense. There were troops all over the place. You could see the small hole that had been blown at the base of the wall going into the embassy, where Viet Cong had gotten through. There were signs of a battle everywhere. The face of the building was pockmarked, and the wall out in front was pockmarked. My friend Bill Simmons and I walked past but were not allowed to enter the embassy.

Fighting continued in Saigon for about a week. Every day and every night we went to the hotel roof to watch the fireworks. After the first night nothing happened in the center of town, but you didn't have to go far to find action. We could see it all from the roof. The smoke and the diving airplanes, the helicopters and the rattle of small arms.

In the middle of the Tet Offensive, Bill Simmons, an FSO colleague, and I got called to come to the CORDS headquarters. We were brought out in a car as there was no public transportation operating. We were told that we were being sent down to the Mekong delta. There were two assignments: one in Vinh-long Province, and the other in Binh Xuyen. It was decided that I would go to Vinh-long, and Bill was destined for Binh Xuyen. The next morning we were taken to Tan Son Nhut Airport for a flight to Can Tho, the mid-Delta location of the IV Corps Headquarters. From there, we would be taken to our provinces.

The next morning, we boarded an Air America aircraft for Can Tho. The VC were still in the university at Can Tho, just on the outskirts of town. I recall seeing American airplanes bombing them as we entered town. It wasn't really very close. We were staying in the CORDS compound and you could see the airplanes coming down, the bombs going off, and hear the shooting. At the CORDS compound itself, however, all was peaceful. The VC had never actually gotten into the center of Can Tho.

The next day, I was taken in a helicopter up to Vinh-long, which is the province just north of Can Tho. The town of Vinh-long, the province capital, is at the north side of the province. To get there from Can Tho you cross Bassac River and cross the whole province before arriving at Vinh-long. At the Vinh-long airport, there was much evidence of recent fighting. The VC had gotten into the airport, and the helicopter crews, on the first morning of the offensive, had to fight for their helicopters. During this action, the airport commander was killed on the tarmac in a shootout with the VC. Once out of the airport and into the town, I found a scene of mass destruction. Much of the center of the town had been reduced to rubble. The VC had taken over virtually all of the center of Vinh-long. Only the province chief's house, and the military headquarters compound had held out in the center of town.

I was replacing an advisor who had been killed during the offensive. His predecessor had also been killed, just before the Tet Offensive, in an ambush. My job was to be the chief of rural development (RD). Essentially, I would be in charge of all of the civilian developmental programs, plus a village pacification program. This would include armed development workers called "RD Cadres" who were supposed to live in and protect villages. Our advisory team was composed of some ten or twelve civilians and about two hundred and fifty military.

Q: These were Americans.

MCNAMARA: These were all Americans, yes. They had lost about five civilians, about half the team.

Q: Boy, that must have been about as bad as anywhere, except for Hue, wasn't it?

MCNAMARA: I think so. I don't know how many members of the team were lost in Hue, but, of course, people there were also taken prisoner in Hue. In Vinh-long losses were deaths. It was really bad. The town was badly mauled. The VC were inside the town and had taken over most of it. Then, to reoccupy it, there were battles, lots of aerial bombardment and so on. There were great piles of bricks and mortar in the middle of the streets. Houses blown into the streets.

Anyway, hearing that your predecessor has just been killed, and that his predecessor was also killed was unsettling. I was the first one who had held the job to walk out alive.

When I arrived, there were hundreds of refugees huddled in the town. Some were from the countryside. Others were townspeople whose homes had been destroyed. We had a very bad situation: (1) to take care of the refugees, and (2) to take back much of the province from the VC. It was very dangerous, or at least it was perceived to be very dangerous in Vinh-long for quite some time after the Tet attacks. We didn't hold very much ground.

Q: When you say "we," how much was American, and how much was Vietnamese?

MCNAMARA: Well, there were no American troops in Vinh-long at all. In the delta, in general, there were no American troops aside from the riverine force, which was made up of only one brigade from the 9th Division. They were mainly on boats and would deploy from the boats on operations. We had the American Navy patrol boats, and some SEAL teams. But that's really all. The Vietnamese were doing virtually all the fighting. However, American advisors were serving with all of the Vietnamese units. We also had our advisory teams with the provincial forces down to district level.

When I arrived, my staff, both Vietnamese and American, were traumatized. They had gone through some very bad experiences. My job was to rebuild confidence and then get them back to work in the countryside.

Q: In the first place, when you arrived there, how did you know what you were supposed to be doing?

MCNAMARA: Well, I was not given any specific instructions. The Province Senior Advisor, an Army colonel named Roberge, was fully occupied with the military situation. Until security was reestablished we could not help the Vietnamese build roads or teach people improved farming techniques. These were the things advisors were trained to do. We were bottled up in the town. These guys had just gone through some horrendous attacks. Many had been shooting it out with the VC. They had to protect their own homes. This was very bad stuff. They didn't have any American troops around to help them; they were on their own. The civilians and the military advisors had to protect themselves. They mustered everybody who could pull a trigger. And that was that. They went through some very bad times.

And the thing wasn't over. When I arrived we were in the middle of the Tet Offensive. They had gotten the VC out of the town itself, but they were just on the outskirts of town.

First, I opened our office and got people to show up for work. We had to go out and find our Vietnamese employees and convince them that it was safe enough to go about the town. We worked like hell to feed the refugees and helping to get tents to shelter them. Initially, this was about all we could do.

Q: Where were you getting the food?

MCNAMARA: The provincial government opened storehouses of rice. Some food was brought in by river barge. But, anyway, we got it in and we fed them. The refugee problem was temporary. But, in some instance, it lasted for a couple of months.

Q: You had military advisors as part of your team, is that right?

MCNAMARA: Oh, yes, yes, I had some military types.

Q: What were the professional American military thinking about this whole business? I mean, they were seeing it from a small shop. How were they taking it?

MCNAMARA: They were shocked by the suddenness of the attacks and by their unexpectedness. In Vinh-long, the VC had been infiltrating into the town for some weeks beforehand. They brought guns in coffins and buried them in a cemetery near the town center. They infiltrated in a variety of ways, and they were inside the town before anybody knew it. Then they started attacking the various Vietnamese installations, and the American advisors. The Vietnamese nationalists, the Army, never really expected this to happen. They thought that Tet was a sacred thing, and that no Vietnamese would violate a truce on Tet by mounting a massive offensive. Many soldiers had been given leave. Units were in barracks preparing to celebrate. Their guard was way down. The attacks could not have been so successful had they not been surprised.

Some two weeks after my arrival the VC mounted a second offensive in Vinh-long and again they got into the town.

At this point I was living in a little compound with most of the other civilian advisors. We were armed and ready to defend ourselves.

I was sharing a trailer with a large USAID fellow. In the middle of the night, the attack was preceded by shelling. He panicked trying to get out of the trailer while putting on a flak jacket. In his haste, he got stuck in the door of the trailer. I was inside and also wanted to get out of the trailer. My companion was a large, frightened mass of quivering flesh jammed in the door. He was incapable of helping himself. To dislodge him, I braced my back against the sink, put my feet on his ass and pushed. It was just like opening a champagne bottle. The cork popped out and shot out the door.

Outside, I helped organize the defense of our compound. We had a retired master sergeant with us, who was a civilian admin officer. He was very useful. We had an M-60 machine gun that we mounted to cover the road outside the compound. We manned holes in the wall. We were ready for war. The VC were in the town, but had not reached our position.

At that uncomfortable time, we got a call from the team headquarters telling me to get our people out of this area as the VC had been seen close to our compound. Three Vietnamese armored "commando" vehicles arrived to escort us to a Navy compound some distance down the road. It was used to lodge SEAL teams and patrol boat crews. The place was relatively well defended-certainly better than our little compound.

I went up on the top of the building, and it was just like a ship's bridge up there. The Navy commander of the little station was there. They had machine guns mounted on the parapet of the building. The commander was directing his defenses from the top of the building, which was probably the worst place to be. It provided a good target with only minimal protection from weapons like an RPG. In any case, I was there with him. We took the odd round, but there was no assault on us. The Navy had an awful lot of armament. Presumably, the VC decided to by-pass our little fortress for there was plenty of fighting further into the city. Our place remained relatively quiet.

After three days, the second mini-Tet attack ran out of steam. We were then able to reopen the office and again encourage our Vietnamese employees to return. It was a gradual hand-holding exercise rebuilding self-confidence. I got them to begin to go out of town to our work sites. Getting them back on the roads was a major accomplishment. I led them by example. Finally, I visited all the districts regularly. At first, I had to go mainly in helicopters, but then I started driving the roads. It was six months before we really built a level of confidence where people would drive without apprehension on the main roads. All the time I was working on our Vietnamese counterparts cajoling, challenging, shaming them into venturing into the countryside where the war would be won or lost.

Tet was more of a psychological problem than it was anything else. In military terms, it failed. But psychologically, it was a great victory. Indeed, the biggest victory was won in the United States, because of its effect on the American people. At the time, however, it traumatized people in Vietnam.

Q: What sort of leadership was there? I'm not talking about you, but the people talking to you. Were they trying to buck you up? Did you have the feeling that we knew what we were doing? I mean, once you got past the initial period of just trying to protect yourself. Were we trying to explain it to ourselves? What was the feeling?

MCNAMARA: Eventually, there was an effort to explain the offensive. It was characterized as a terrible defeat for the VC. This was, of course, true in purely military terms. However, it missed the more important point of the impact on confidence in the U.S. Indeed, it was a watershed. The USG was never again able to convince the American people that the war was winnable. After all, they had seen VC in the American Embassy compound on TV.

The Vietnamese province chief, who had arrived in Vinh-long shortly before Tet, was a good leader and a very tough guy. His name was Nghia. They used to call him the "coup man." He was a cavalry colonel, a regular Vietnamese army officer. He had commanded the APC in which the Diem brothers were killed after the 1963 coup d'etat.

Q: The brothers Diem.

MCNAMARA: The brothers Diem were killed. He played a controversial part in their assassination. It's not clear whether he participated in the actual assassination or not. But he was certainly part of the coup. Obviously, the generals who organized the coup picked his troop of APCs to go out and get them. Therefore, he must have been considered politically reliable. I've heard a variety of stories, but the one that seems to be the most reliable is that it was Big Minh's aide-de-camp who actually did the shooting. But Nghia was there and he might have pulled the trigger himself. I don't know. He was involved in several other coups, and spent some time in Cambodia cooling off after one of the coups. He was a guy who was feared and not somebody that many of the generals had great faith in. They were afraid of him because he was hot tempered and an idealist. He was also involved in Vietnamese nationalist politics. So he probably never would have been given the job as a province chief if the situation was not desperate and his predecessor had not been badly wounded. They had to put a good soldier into the job, so he was chosen. I wasn't there when he first arrived, so I can't speak to that too much. But it is obvious to me, from what I know of Vietnam now, that he would not have been a prime candidate, except in a time of extreme crisis.

Providentially, he was there, because he was a damn good soldier. He did a remarkable job in Vinh-long in fighting the war with his provincial forces. He got the troops out and got them working, and he pushed the VC away from the various towns. Gradually, he took back control of the province in about six months time. The fighting was hard but the VC were on the run by July-August of 1968.

I remember we went to one very isolated district town down on the Mang Thit-Nicholai Canal, which is a principal canal that the rice boats take going from one arm of the Mekong to the other, north-south, on the way to the market in Saigon. It's one of the most important waterways in the delta. It cuts right across Vinh-long. They'd had horrendous battles with the VC over control of this waterway for some years before. I remember going down there to resupply the place and bring new troops in.

I told the Province Senior Advisor that I had to go with the convoy reopening the canal after Tet. Teams of my RD cadres were young going in for the first time, and I felt I should be with them. He didn't want me to go. He said, "No, it's too dangerous. I don't want you to go."

And I said, "But that's my job."

He said, "But you're a civilian. You shouldn't be doing that."

I said, "Look, we're all in this. This isn't a question of being civilian or military. Those guys are my responsibility, and I feel that I have to go with them."

Finally, he gave me permission to go along. We went down on Vietnamese landing craft guarded by monitors, heavily armed with 40- and 20- millimeter guns. We expected to be ambushed on the way down the narrow canal, but we weren't. We got to the beleaguered district town. This was the first ground resupplies that they had in over four months. Previously, helicopters were their only communication with the outside. Our operation played a big part in opening up the canal.

During the latter part of my stay there, we actually started to really do things in terms of development. We introduced the new IR-8 miracle rice. At first, it was difficult to overcome the farmers reluctance to experiments. Peasant farmers live from harvest to harvest. They can't afford to gamble with their crop.

Q: It takes quite a bit of fertilizer, too, doesn't it?

MCNAMARA: It does, it takes fertilizer and irrigation during the dry season. We were prepared to supply fertilizers and pumps for irrigation. The farmer's uncertainty was our greatest stumbling block. We tried to convince them to try the new rice strains without success. Finally, we had to hire experimental plots in various parts of the province. Vinh-long is one of the richest rice-growing provinces in Vietnam. We hired these experimental plots in every district, and we underwrote the planting of the new rice on these plots. We said, "If you don't get a good crop, we'll pay you for your losses." I had two agricultural advisors assigned to my team. One old guy (I don't know exactly how old he was; he certainly had white hair) had been an agricultural advisor in upstate New York, a county agent. And he was really marvelous, Bill something or other, a really marvelous old man. The two of them rolled up their sleeves and helped the farmers, showing them the techniques of applying the fertilizer. The rice crop from this IR-8 rice was so much more abundant than the harvest from the traditional varieties of rice, that we didn't have to sell anything after that. The farmers were lining up in front of my door, trying to get seeds for the next planting. And so we really succeeded in the opening phases of the green revolution in the Mekong delta.

Q: Did that require outside support, or could that continue without our help?

MCNAMARA: Once they were convinced that it was a good thing, then it didn't require any outside help except for making available fertilizer and small pumps.

I'll jump forward now. I came back to Can Tho as consul general in 1974, six years later, and by this time, the green revolution had already taken place. The farmers were on their own. They were going great guns. All they needed was fertilizer and gasoline for their pumps. They had the money to buy it, as long as those ingredients were available. They had small Japanese pumps that could draw water in and irrigate their crops during the dry period. They were getting, I think it was, three or four harvests a year this way, whereas previously they'd only gotten two. They were getting extra harvests, and each harvest was far more abundant than the previous one.

A couple of other things happened that we are responsible for.

One was the rural banks, which were very important in the green revolution. We set up provincial rural banks in each province. This got the farmers out of the hands of the Chinese moneylenders. They could go and get loans at reasonable rates to finance their crops.

The other thing we did was land distribution to the tiller. Previously, the delta was owned by large landowners, and the Vietnamese peasants in the delta were, by and large, sharecroppers. And we, the Americans (and we can certainly be proud of this), got the Vietnamese government to agree to a land redistribution in the delta. The landlords were paid for their land, and the land was redistributed to the actual tillers, the people who were working on the land and who were cultivating it.

The confluence of all of these factors resulted in a real revolution, a green revolution, in the delta. By 1975, rice production had increased to the point that Vietnam was again ready to export rice-for the first time in over ten years. Before the war, Vietnam had been the breadbasket of Southeast Asia. They had produced large surpluses. During the war, production fell off. In fact, we were importing American rice to feed the population.

The green revolution was also having a political effect. By 1974-75, the Viet Cong had almost disappeared. Their manpower sources had dried up, because the farmers were no longer discontent. They were prosperous owners of their own land. They had no reason to go to war against the government. They were benefiting from the status quo. All they wanted was to keep their sons on the farms, because they needed their labor to produce. The supply of manpower to both the VC and the government army was drying up in the delta. The local VC was pretty much out of business in the Mekong delta. We were finding, by 1974, that the bulk of the troops opposing the Vietnamese national army, were northerners. The local boys were no longer interested.

Q: How long were you in Vinh-long?

MCNAMARA: I was in Vinh-long from February until September 1968. So I was there for about eight or nine months.

Q: What was your impression of the direction of the program from CORDS and the embassy?

MCNAMARA: Well, most of our direction came from CORDS Headquarters. Komer was very active and very dynamic. He was also a little crazy. I think a lot of his activity was silly. Nonetheless, he did get support for our program and respect from the military.

One of the most controversial aspects of our efforts was the preoccupation with quantifying everything. Some of the things we dealt in couldn't be quantified. But some of the techniques that they were using weren't bad. They tried to quantify village security. Okay, the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) was imperfect, but we didn't have any other tools, and so it was better than nothing. You can make fun of it; you can say, "How can you analyze these things statistically?" Well, you can't, perfectly. But you can use this imperfect information-tempered with common sense-to plan and to direct resources.

Q: "Did you spend the night in the village?" That type of thing?

MCNAMARA: For instance, Do the farmers cultivate their fields? Does the village chief spend evenings in the hamlets? Does the district chief come down and spend time? There were many indicators used to measure conditions in a hamlet. There was an economics side, and there was a social side, and there was a political side, and there was a military side to it. And they were refining it all the time. This was done by American advisors, so it wasn't cooked. The advisors were told not to fool with it, to do it as honestly as they could. If the HES didn't come out right, if it didn't show brilliant pacification, their careers weren't harmed. They didn't get bad efficiency reports if they didn't show instant results on pacification. Because, after all, they were advisors, they weren't there to lead the troops themselves.

Anyway, it may have been an imperfect tool, but it was a tool. And that's something that CORDS developed. It was useful, given those circumstances and given the kinds of people that were running the system at that time.

William Colby, who later became the head of CIA, came out as Komer's deputy. I remember Colby came to Vinh-long one weekend and stayed overnight with us. He was going out to various provinces to try to get a better feel for what was going on. He wanted to show the flag, and to prove that the top leadership was sharing some of the dangers with those of us in the trenches. He did get to know people and hear points of view that might not occur to his staff in Saigon.

After dinner, on Saturday night, we had a long philosophic bull session about the war. A liberal supply of alcohol assured that there were no holds barred. He encouraged us to be completely frank.

In any case, there was no reason not to be. For Christ's sake, we were there at the cutting edge of the war. Nobody was going to send us to Vietnam, and certainly nobody was going to send us further out into the boondocks. We were already there. Most of us, therefore, weren't too worried about saying what we had on our minds.

I remember telling him that I really felt that it was immoral for us to continue to encourage the Vietnamese to fight if we weren't willing to stay as long as it was required to stay. It was obvious to me at this point that the tactic of the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong was to wait us out. They assumed that we would tire and leave. If we weren't willing to stay the whole course, which meant convincing the North that we were willing to stay and that we weren't going to walk away from Vietnam, then it was immoral for us to continue to encourage the South Vietnamese to pursue the war. It would only mean that more people would get killed, and the result would be inevitable. Eventually, our friends would fall. We had to really do what we had done in Korea, which was to provide a credible American force there that was going to stay indefinitely until the threat had disappeared. And unless we were willing to do that, then we really should get the hell out.

He didn't really have any answer to that. He fumbled around a bit with it. Ultimately, I guess, he probably agreed with me, but couldn't say so.

Anyway, I can't say that we didn't get any leadership.

Q: I wasn't asking in a pejorative way; I wanted to get a feel for the actual situation.

MCNAMARA: I don't think it was that bad. I think Komer was foolish. He didn't provide very good leadership, but he was there. Colby was much better.

Q: You left in September '68.

MCNAMARA: Yes, and went to Quang-tri.

Q: When you left, how did you feel things were going?

MCNAMARA: They were going very well. At that time, they were going very well in Vinh-long.

Q: So the shock of the Tet Offensive...

MCNAMARA: It was finally dissipated, and confidence was restored. The Americans and the Vietnamese were doing lots of things. We were moving resources into the country.

I remember one night I was in our little compound when suddenly I heard a lot of noise outside. Trucks, many trucks going towards Saigon. They were moving on the main route, Route 4, just on the outskirts of the town. I thought it was a military convoy. I remember looking out the gate to see what was making so much noise, and found that they were civilian trucks, carrying food to Saigon. They were traveling at night to arrive at the market the next morning in Saigon. They were carrying all the bounty-the marvelous fruits, vegetables, fish, pork and rice-that's produced in the Mekong delta in such profusion. There it was: the economy had been restored. These were civilians bringing food to the capital.

So, no, things were looking up by the time I left.

Q: Where did you go?

MCNAMARA: I went to Quang-tri.

Q: Could you explain...

MCNAMARA: Quang-tri...province...the Republic of South Vietnam. Its northern border was the 17th parallel, which was the border between the north and the south, the Communist-controlled north and the nationalist-controlled south. It was the scene of probably the heaviest fighting that took place in the war. The greatest concentration of Americans was up there. It was the site of Khe Sanh, the embattled, surrounded military base that the North Vietnamese were hoping to take. The Marines turned out to be a lot more difficult to dislodge than the French were at Dien Bien Phu.

Quang-tri is a difficult place to live. The climate is dreadful. During the winter rainy season, it's constantly enveloped in a permanent blanket of heavy mist. It's almost like being underwater, it's so damp and cold. The dampness penetrates to the bone. I found it very difficult to get warm even inside. In the dry season, it gets hot, and dry. The red clay turns to powder that is blown dust clouds by a hot wind from Laos. Quang-tri has no agreeable season. Vietnamese avoided service there. Our province chief was a sleepy Cham gentleman who was there because no Vietnamese wanted a job that was fought over in other more salubrious provinces.

Q: You've persuaded me not to buy any real estate there.

MCNAMARA: No, it certainly is not a vacation place. I can't think of any advantages to life in Quang-tri.

And the people are correspondingly hard. They have a reputation of being among the toughest people in Vietnam-for obvious reasons. You couldn't live there unless you were tough. It would be survival of the fittest, and you'd have to be very fit indeed just to survive.

It also is the site of the Roman Catholic national shrine in Vietnam called La-Vang. In the 18th and 19th centuries, there were martyrs there, Catholics who were killed by the old imperial authorities in Hue. So martyrdom was a big thing. There is a little cathedral there called Our Lady of La-Vang. Mary is supposed to have appeared to people. It's a holy place for Vietnamese Catholics.

Quang-tri lies to the north of Hue, the old imperial capital. The climate in Hue, however, is much better than in Quang-tri.

Colby got me the job as deputy province senior advisor there. The province senior advisor was an Army colonel named Mooney, who was a very tough, good soldier. He'd been in Vietnam twice before, in American units. He'd been a battalion commander, and I think he was the G-3 of the 25th or the 24th Division. A well-decorated soldier. He went on to become a brigadier general. Then, he had a heart attack and was forced to retire.

Living in Quang-tri in those days was a little bit like being in Verdun in World War I. The North Vietnamese were just across the Ben-hai River, on the 17th parallel. They would shell, using artillery that they had dug into caves on the other side of the river. They'd wheel them out and fire some shells at us. Quang-tri City was just within their artillery range. Then they'd pull them back in, and the Americans would riposte.

Most of the defenders of Quang-tri were American. It had the largest concentration of American troops in the country. The commander of the American troops in I Corps was a Marine. He had two Marine divisions, the 1st and the 3rd, and a Marine air wing under his command. The Marines were also bolstered by some Army units. In Quang-tri itself, we had the 3rd Marine Division, with either a full air wing or a good portion of an air wing to support them, as well as other ancillary units like Seabees.

When I arrived, there was also an Army mechanized brigade, as well as the 1st Cavalry supporting the withdrawal from Khe Sanh. They had a lot of action in Quang-tri and really hurt the North Vietnamese badly, but then they left and went someplace else. They were used as a highly mobile fire brigade, going around the country where a sudden shock unit was required.

Anyway, there were an awful lot of American soldiers around, Marines mainly. That was new to me coming from the Mekong delta. The climate was also different, as was the type of war. There was no such thing as a guerrilla war up there. It was heavy units, divisions, regiments and battalions against similar regular Army units from North Vietnam. One saw precious few black pajama clad country boys wandering about with a stalk of sugar cane in one hand and an AK47 in the other. They were fighting major-unit, classical-war formations. This was a different kind of war than I had known in the Mekong delta.

Q: What were you doing?

MCNAMARA: I was the deputy province senior advisor. I was the number two, in charge of a team of about 300 advisors who supported the province government and the province forces. Each province had certain local forces that were raised and commanded by the province chief. The province chief, in every case, was a military officer. And so he had his own small army that he could deploy locally. They were light infantry. They were regular soldiers, but they were promised that they wouldn't have to leave their own province if they joined the RF or PF (regional forces or popular forces).

The Provincial advisors in Quang-tri provided liaison between the American forces and the Vietnamese local administration. That was our most important task because of the size of American forces in the province.

Another was to deal with refugees. There were thousands of refugees. The place had been fought over for years. There'd been horrendous battles, dating back to the war with the French. The fabled "Street Without Joy" is located in Quang-tri. The people had been driven off the land and out of their villages. Also people living along the coast were bundled up and sent to refugee camps. The North Vietnamese had been landing arms and infiltrators along the coast. The local villagers were thought to be (and probably were) sympathetic to the North had been displaced from the coast. These fishermen were just taken off the coast and sent inland and put in refugee camps.

We developed a plan to reestablish the fishermen on the coast, but under supervision, to prevent infiltration by the North. They were allowed to fish and to earn their living and to get out of the refugee camps under controlled conditions.

And so, one of the things that I did when I first got there was to develop a plan for the resettlement of these coastal fishermen.

Later, I also developed a similar program for another area. There's a river that comes down from the mountains up around Khe Sanh and empties into the sea. It comes right across the northern part of Quang-tri Province. The river valley had been populated and farmed before the people were displaced by the war. By the time I had arrived things were better. We had a lot of troops in the area. It seemed feasible to resettle these people back onto their lands and villages.

Originally, the Australians had supplied irrigation pumps in the area to be resettled. I decided to appeal to the Australian Embassy for help in getting the pumps working again. After some hemming and hawing, the Australian Ambassador did provide the needed spare parts. In any case, I spent a good deal of my time resettling refugees.

Q: When you talk about resettling refugees, how did this work? How did you advise and consult with the province chief?

MCNAMARA: Well, the province chief was half asleep most of the time. When he wasn't fully asleep, he was half asleep. He really wasn't doing very much. We really had to do it ourselves.

Q: You mean you bypassed him, basically.

MCNAMARA: We bypassed him. We'd get his okay on things, but it was really pro forma. He wasn't going to say no, because he didn't want to be bothered. To oppose us would have caused him some bother. Moreover, he was the Vietnamese token Cham. He had little real influence with his own hierarchy.

Q: Cham being...

MCNAMARA: The Cham are an ethnic group that predated the Vietnamese arrival in what's now central Vietnam. They were Muslims. They'd no doubt migrated into this area from Cambodia a couple of thousand years ago. There are lots of Cham ruins, very interesting ruins around central Vietnam. They were driven out of central Vietnam or assimilated by the ethnic Vietnamese. Nonetheless, there are small pockets of them left in Vietnam.

Q: I'm surprised, that being such a battleground, they didn't put a tough military man in there.

MCNAMARA: Well, they didn't. I'm not sure why, but I suppose it was because there really wasn't very much for him to do. The real military decisions were taken by the American Army and Marine Corps. And there was a Vietnamese division as well, the best division of the Vietnamese Army, the 1st Division led by one of their best generals. They were also very active, working with the Americans. So there really wasn't a hell of a lot for a Province chief to do.

Q: Here you were in a really military situation. Was there much interest in or awareness of, say, the Vietnam political scene? Or were you getting sensitive to the Vietnam political scene?

MCNAMARA: Oh, yes. No, I was very sensitive to it, especially when I got to Quang-tri. Central Vietnam was traditionally the most politically active part of Vietnam. Much more so than the Mekong delta. The Mekong delta was really pretty much apolitical. In the delta, most of the people didn't even take an active interest, much less participate, in politics. In central Vietnam, it was quite the opposite. People were very politicized, very interested, very active in politics. There were several political parties. Only a few years earlier, it had been the site of the Buddhist struggle movement against the Diem regime. Central Vietnam was really the place where that took place. It was put down by the army, but the feelings were still there, and the sensitivity was still there. I got to know some of the local Buddhist monks in Quang-tri. Some of them had been active in the Buddhist struggle movement.

We were plugged in politically. Colonel Mooney, the province senior advisor, was an unusual guy. He was very interested in politics. He was a super soldier, but in Quang-tri he took a far greater interest in the civilian, or quasi-civilian, side of things, political and economic, than he did in straight military affairs. We had a small inner circle there. I had my own house, with another young FSO. He was the refugee advisor.

Q: Who was that?

MCNAMARA: His name was Dick Cummin. He killed himself on a motorcycle here in Washington.

Q: He worked for me in Greece.

MCNAMARA: That's right, he was in Greece. Well, he and I were very close friends. Having spent a year there together, we became very close. In fact, I visited him in Greece.

Q: He bought that damn motorcycle. And we were telling him, as good consular officers, "These things kill you."

MCNAMARA: Well, he got drunk and took it out. Must have fallen down or gotten knocked down, hit his head, and that was that. I met his mother and took care of her in Lebanon, when I was DCM in Beirut. I got her out of East Beirut, and she lived with me for about five, six months. Then she insisted on going back. Anyway, that's another whole story.

Mooney had a USAID fellow, a guy named John Cleary, living with him. And the four of us ate our meals together. We had a little mess in Mooney's house. We all became very close friends. He relied on this small group of civilians that he had close to him more than he did on the military members of the team. Obviously, he paid attention to them, and he was a very fine soldier, but he saw the opportunities for doing something in Quang-tri more in civilian terms than he did in military terms.

The military campaign was really under the control of the generals. We weren't going to have a great impact there. All we could do was coordinate and provide the liaison between the Vietnamese provincial officials and the big Army units. But the resettlement of refugees and things like that, which were very important to everyone, these were things that we could handle with lots of support from the American forces. Mooney was bright enough to realize that he was more likely to make a reputation in Army by doing unusual things like resettling thousands of refugees than he could in directing a rag-tag bunch of Vietnamese militiamen.

Q: Did you get any other feelings, now that you were at a different level, about how...

MCNAMARA: Oh, I was at the same level.

Q: How did you look upon Saigon, your direction from there and all?

MCNAMARA: It was very distant. We were really far more responsive to the American military command in northern I Corps. There was also something called the 24th Corps up there. At the time of the battle in Khe Sanh, Westmoreland lost faith in the Marine command at Danang. He imposed another command on northern I Corps, called the 24th Corps, and put an Army general in charge, a guy named Stilwell.

Q: Richard Stilwell?

MCNAMARA: Yes.

Q: He was in command of troops in Korea when I was serving there. Was this common knowledge, how Westmoreland felt about the Marines?

MCNAMARA: Oh, it was in all the newspapers. It was a real slap in the face for the Marines for an Army general to be superimposed between one of their principal troop units and the Marine command. A Marine amphibious force, 3 MAF was what the Marines called the command in Danang, which was in charge of all of I Corps. They had their own air support, and their troop units are all integrated into a single team. Air and ground troops were all under the same commander in the Marines. This provided close coordination. Their doctrine and modus operandi are much different than the Army and the Air Force. The Marines, of course, are very proud of their famous Corps.

Q: What was it they had done, or not done?

MCNAMARA: Khe Sanh. I think Westmoreland felt that they had gotten themselves into a very exposed position in Khe Sanh.

Q: It became a matter of prestige to hang onto a piece of real estate that really didn't matter.

MCNAMARA: It was a little bit like the French in Dien Bien Phu. This was what people were so frightened of. It couldn't have happened to the Americans, because they had such overwhelming air power. There wasn't any way that the North Vietnamese could really mount a big, concentrated assault on Khe Sanh that could be successful in the face of this enormous air power that we could bring to bear. We were using B-52s to carpet-bomb around the Khe Sanh perimeter at one point. We also had lots of artillery. And we were never cut off; we always had support coming in. We were getting bombarded all the time. It was a difficult position. and it was one that was perhaps stupid to get tied down to, but, nonetheless, the North Vietnamese couldn't take it either, I don't believe.

Q: And they got tied down, too.

MCNAMARA: That's right. It was a meat grinder for them.

Q: Did you get involved with our main line units there as far as making them more sensitive to the problems of the populous? Was this what you did?

MCNAMARA: Yes. We talked to the officers, but we didn't talk to the men at that point. Later on, when I became the principal officer in Danang, I was also political advisor to the Marine general, the commander of 3 MAF; the senior commander in I Corps. The Marines had come up with the idea of...I think they were called civic action platoons (CAP). These were small units of platoon size that were put in villages, to live in the villages and to protect them. They had a training school in Danang for Marines who were going to go into the program. I lectured on Vietnamese politics at the training school, to sensitize the Marines to the differences in politics, the religious issues, the political issues and the ethnic issues. In Quang-tri, we talked to the commanders and to their staffs.

We would try, for instance, to serve as advocates for the Vietnamese. If the large units were doing something that was interfering with the local population, or somehow or other the local people were affected by some of their operations, we'd go and talk to the commanders to see if they would modify their operations so that they wouldn't harm the interests of the local villagers.

Also, we got a lot of resources from the American units. They would provide us with all kinds of civic-action resources, materials for instance, skilled labor. A village, for instance, might need a bridge built between two parts of a village, or they'd want to have a little market constructed, or to have something done with a road. The American forces were there in large numbers, they had lots of resources, and they did help the population a great deal in that way. They were trying to be good corporate citizens, in the American way. In the process, they did a certain amount of good.

Q: How long were you there in Quang-tri?

MCNAMARA: I was there from September 1968 until April 1969.

Q: And then what did you do?

MCNAMARA: A man named Nick Thorne, an FSO assigned to the embassy in Saigon, was in charge of a provincial reporting unit in Saigon. He had a group of young FSOs who went out and lived and worked in the provinces and would report on political events in their areas of assignment directly to the embassy. Thorne came on a visit to Quang-tri. He was going around the country. I took him out and introduced him to some of the bonzes and political figures that I'd gotten to know.

Q: A bonze is a Buddhist priest.

MCNAMARA: He was impressed with my contacts. So, when he went back to Saigon, he talked to his superiors, and they offered me the job as principal officer in Danang. They wished to open a consulate in Danang. There was no consular post in the country outside Saigon since the closing of the consulate general in Hue. It was important to have a diplomatic listening post in central Vietnam, the most politically active region in the country and the furthest from Saigon.

When the post was offered to me, I told people in Saigon I would love the job. It did mean signing on for a second prolonged tour in Vietnam-something that many other FSOs were not keen to take on.

Q: I might add that I was consul general in Saigon at this particular time. And it was an extrusion; it was a consular unit that was, very nebulously until that time, part of the consular section in Saigon up there.

MCNAMARA: The historic background went back to the closing of the consulate general in Hue, during the Buddhist struggles in '65. It was then intended to move the consulate general to Danang. They acquired a building and a residence. All was prepared short of appointing a principal officer. This was benched by a former Ambassador who was serving as the Deputy for CORDS for I Corps with his headquarters in Danang. He was in charge of the CORDS program in all of I Corps. He did not wish to have an independent consul resident in Danang who might compete with him for prestige. Somehow he was able to bench the opening of the consulate as an independent post. A consular office was opened, however, that carried on many of the functions of a consulate, but without the stature of a full consulate. A junior political officer was in nominal charge-obviously no threat to the amour propre of the former Ambassador.

To complete his hatchet job, the gentleman cooped the principal officer's residence complete with china, silver and car. The arrangement was reconsidered upon the departure of the ex-ambassador and his replacement by a man from USAID named Alexander Ferber. The embassy and the Department realized they needed an independent observer in I Corps outside the CORDS/MACV chain of command. Someone who was directly responsive to the Ambassador and the embassy.

I was offered the job, and took it. I had to get out of CORDS, of course, I was still assigned to CORDS. So I went to see Bill Colby in Saigon. He was, by this time, in charge of CORDS. I asked him to release me from the remaining months of my commitment to CORDS. Colby asked if I would not rather have a more senior post in CORDS? I remember telling him that, "I feel like Caesar in Gaul when he said 'Better to be chief in the smallest village of Gaul than number two in Rome.'" (That's a bad paraphrasing of what Caesar actually said, but that's the sense of it.) My weak classical reference may have seemed bizarre, but it touched something in Colby. He gave me my release from CORDS.

I became the principal officer in Danang in April of 1969. We didn't have the formal inauguration until the next February.

Q: You had to have a shaman or somebody come up with a proper date and all that.

MCNAMARA: Oh, I consulted a Chinese wizard-astrologer-geomancer. I brought him down from Hue. I sought him out because he had an extraordinary reputation as a seer. His name was Mr. Hong. His reputation dated from a consultation with Nguyen Van Thieu, the president of the Republic of Vietnam when Nguyen Van Thieu was a captain in the army in Hue. Hong reputedly told the young Thieu that perhaps he would be president of the republic one day. Thieu became president and Hong's reputation was made.

Before assuming my post in Danang, I went off on consultations in Laos for a week to see what things were like on that side of the border. My consular district comprised all of I Corps with a common border with Laos. Anyway, I spent a week in Laos to see what was going on there. I also stopped in Thailand for a week's rest in Bangkok before proceeding to Danang.

I remember flying up on Air Vietnam. I didn't take Air America, the CIA airline that also served most of our non-military needs in Vietnam. As a regularly assigned diplomat, I preferred to use the regular civilian Air Vietnam flight. When I landed, there was nobody to meet me. I'd expected the staff from the consulate to come out to greet their new principal officer. Instead, I had to ride the Air Vietnam bus, which was not all that great-little old ladies with chickens and baskets full of vegetables. It was a decidedly inglorious arrival at my first post as principal officer. Traditions in the Foreign Service-even in the most remote places-call for a new principal officer to be met by his staff at the airport. I got myself on the bus with my bags and went into town. At the Air Vietnam office in town, I hired a cyclo to take me and my bags to the consulate.

Q: Those are pedicabs.

MCNAMARA: Yes. Cyclo is what the Vietnamese call them. I arrived at my new post as principal officer in a pedicab. To add to my discomfort the Marine guards refused to open the gate for me. The consulate was closed. They told me, "Come back tomorrow!" I tried to explain that I was the new consul. Finally, they agreed to arouse the guy in charge of administration, a very sleepy fellow, who lived at the consulate. By this time, I was mad enough to chew nails and spit tacks. When he arrived at the gate in his underwear, he told me, "Oh, yeah. We heard you were coming. Oh, isn't it nice you got here." He then remembered that I was still outside a chain link fence with my bags perched on the seat of a cyclo. "Do let the new consul in," he instructed the Marines.

After he dressed, we road over to my house. It was a small villa situated on a quiet back street not far from the principal market in central Danang. The house was charming. The insides had been gutted by a previous occupant. The brick walls and beams were laid bare. A loft had been added as a second bedroom. The kitchen was modern and my bedroom was air conditioned. It would not have served as a principal officer's residence any place else, but I was quite happy with it.

Q: I spent the night there when I came to visit you.

MCNAMARA: In the loft. It was a nice little house.

The consulate itself was in a nice old villa on a side street next to the French lycée. At first, I thought somebody was very foresighted when they picked out this nice house, a beautiful little white house on a nice plot of ground, with grace old trees and a large lawn in front. As I got to know the place a bit better, I found out how we got the house. It turned out that the corps commander, who was a scoundrel named General Lam, a truly dreadful man...

Q: He was a crook, wasn't he?

MCNAMARA: Oh, a crook of the first water.

Q: He had these warehouses.

MCNAMARA: And he was a major drug dealer-he and his wife. In any case, he gave us the house. I guess he thought it would be funny. No Vietnamese would live in it as they thought it was haunted.

The story, as it was told to me by a long-time neighbor, involved a French colonel who had lived there with his Vietnamese consort. His Vietnamese lady found out that he was cheating on her. She committed suicide, but her spirit is said still to haunt the house. Some neighbors swear to have seen a beautiful lady, in a white ao dai floating around the garden at night. They claimed that her feet never quite touched the ground. In fact, lawyer Song, who lived on the corner opposite the consulate, who drank a good deal of whiskey, swears that he frequently saw the lady floating around the garden. I was always suspicious that the whiskey might have contributed to his visions. I had an admin officer, an African-American named Lou Russell, who took the odd nip as well, who claims that he was awakened a few times with his bed dancing around. He lived in an apartment in the consulate.

I was never privileged to witness any of these happenings. But the neighbors were convinced that the place was haunted.

I installed myself in Danang and set about opening our independent consulate in central Vietnam. It was the only post in Vietnam, aside from Saigon.

Q: What were your duties?

MCNAMARA: Mainly political. And one of the main targets was the non-Communist opposition. It wasn't a target exactly, it was an audience or a clientele. I also advised the American military and the CORDS people on political affairs. Central Vietnam was the most politicized part of the country, as I said before, so it was important to have someone who was in touch with the politics of the region.

The Buddhist struggle movement, although it had been put down, was still simmering just under the surface. There were political parties, some of which had a substantial membership. And then, of course, there was the political activities of the Viet Cong to report on and to analyze. Not just their military campaign, but their political campaign. Indeed, you couldn't separate the two. They viewed military activity as an extension of their political campaign. Of course, they were absolutely right, but it was sometimes difficult to explain this to some of our military brethren. They weren't fighting a war just for the pleasure of fighting and dying. There were political purposes behind their carrying on this long and very costly war.

Anyway, those were the principal things that I was supposed to be doing.

We did have a small consular section, with one vice consul devoted to that. We had a fair-sized American community in the region. Not just soldiers (we had about 300,000 soldiers in our consular district), we also had a lot of American civilians-American-company contractors supporting the military. There was also a sizable USAID and CORDS civilian presence.

We also did some economic analysis and reporting.

Q: What was your impression of and how did you make contact with the opposition parties in the area?

MCNAMARA: Oh, I identified leaders of these groups, and the ones I found to be useful contacts, I met with frequently. Gradually, one enlarges his circle of contacts and acquaintances. The process is now called networking. As you got to know people, they would introduce you to more people. It fed on itself, as it would in any other Foreign Service situation. Aside from the war, my activities were not essentially different from those of a principal officer with primarily political responsibilities in any country in the world.

Q: What was the impression you were getting from this group and others about the Thieu government?

MCNAMARA: They didn't care much for the Thieu government. However, after the Tet experience with the Communists, many took the view of supporting the lesser of two evils. The things that the Communists did, especially in Hue, really had a big impact on the people in I Corps. There was a healthier realism towards the real character and the real aims of the Communists after the atrocious acts that took place at that time. A lot of people who had strongly opposed the government previously and who had demonstrated against them during the Buddhist struggle movement, were ready to accept the government, if not enthusiastically support it. They didn't like the government particularly, but they were frightened of the VC. They had lost their innocence and were now reluctant to play into the VC's hands by weakening the government.

Q: How about the Buddhists, did they...

MCNAMARA: These were principally the Buddhists that I'm talking about. Many Buddhist monks expressed these sentiments privately to me. There were many who had been leaders in the struggle movement.

Q: How did your role as political advisor to I Corps work out?

MCNAMARA: With difficulty. I can give you two instances.

I wasn't taken terribly seriously by the Marine general who was there when I first got there, named Nickerson. I would brief him once a week. He had me briefing the CAP platoons, but he wasn't too interested in politics.

One of my vice consuls developed a dossier on the Korean Marines who were under his command. They had a base south of Danang at a place called Hoi An. The vice consul...

Q: Who was this, Don Westmore?

MCNAMARA: No, it wasn't Westmore. It was Jim Mack. He found that the Korean Marines weren't really very effective militarily. In fact, they were often guilty of brutalizing the population. He found that they stayed on their base, except to carry on a very active black market. Their reputation as aggressive soldiers had been built by careful attention to public relations rather than by any real participation in an active combat role. They had become more a negative factor than a positive one, because of the things that they were doing to the people.

For instance, if somebody fired one shot at a Korean from a village, they would level the village. Of course, the VC saw the political gain to be had in provoking them. The Korean's reaction was predictable, spreading further animosity among the people toward the government that was allied with such brutes.

Jim Mack wrote a well documented report on the Koreans that included an eye witness account of a Korean senior officer threatening to shoot a Vietnamese district chief when he complained about some of the things that the Koreans were doing in his district. Mack was there during the altercation. His presence may well have saved the Vietnamese officer's life.

When I showed General Nickerson Jim Mack's report, he became defensive refusing to accept what Mack reported was true. When I pressed him to use his authority to bring the Koreans under control, he tried to get me removed. He asked MACV to get me removed. But Ambassador Bunker told General Westmoreland that I was his man there and that he found what I was reporting accurate and useful.

Another time, I raised the subject of corruption by Vietnamese generals with Nickerson. At the time, there was a general Thuan who was the commander of the 2nd Division in southern I Corps. He was accused of implication in illegal exporting of cinnamon. No doubt, he was taking bribes in return for his assistance in the affair. At about the same time, he was accused of raping a 12-year-old. He really had a very unsavory reputation. People in Saigon were trying to remove him. This was the first time that the Vietnamese government had moved against a general for corruption. In my briefing of Nickerson I said, "It's a very good thing. People see this as a positive sign, that even generals are not above the law, that the government is willing to take action against a general when he's caught with his hand in the cookie jar."

Nickerson got very angry, and he said, "I'll bet you'd like to get rid of General Lam, too."

And I said, "You're right, I would. He's a crook, and he's poisoning your Marines. He and his wife are at the center of the drug trafficking in I Corps, and they're selling drugs to your men. You are quite right, Sir. I would like to get rid of him."

Nickerson almost came across the desk after me, he was so mad. With evident difficulty he controlled himself.

Q: Why was he being protective like this?

MCNAMARA: Well, he didn't want to make any waves with the Vietnamese.

Q: Politically...

MCNAMARA: Most American officers wanted to be known as having good relations with their Vietnamese counterparts. It looked good on their efficiency reports.

Q: Nobody wanted to make waves with them?

MCNAMARA: Actually it was more basic than that with Lam. I reckon that Nickerson felt he had a tacit agreement with Lam. At least this is the way I saw it. Nothing was publicly ever said, I'm sure, and maybe Nickerson didn't consciously realize that he was shielding Lam in return for the latter's acquiescence to any kind of military operation that Nickerson proposed. His ability to gain Lam's cooperation made Nickerson look good to his superiors. He had good counterpart relations. This was something that they emphasized in MACV: "You've got to have good relations with your Vietnamese military counterparts." If the American commander wanted to propose an operation someplace or other, Lam always said, "Oh, marvelous operation. Yes, you have my full cooperation." So Nickerson never had any problems with the Vietnamese as a result. And this was worth a great deal to him in career terms, because it made him look as though he was a very effective commander, one who could deal with an ally and get him to do the things that he wanted him to do. So it made him look good, and he didn't have the problems that some of the other American commanders were having with Vietnamese generals who weren't quite as cooperative as Lam was. Anyway, I'm sure that that was Nickerson's interest. Lam's interest was, of course, his business. Jesus, he'd sign any goddamn thing for any kind of an operation that Nickerson wanted as long as they left his and his wife's business interests alone. These interests included drugs.

Q: Were you reporting back to Saigon on all this?

MCNAMARA: Oh, yes.

Q: Well, how did Nickerson respond on Lam, other than restraining himself from hitting you? Did you keep meeting him?

MCNAMARA: Yes, I used to keep seeing him once a week in his office, but it was pretty cool. He paid scant attention to what I told him. But then, ultimately, he left. The military didn't stay around all that long.

For a while, we had a very good Marine general. He was an aviator. Not that that makes any difference. There were some first-class Marine generals. Nickerson was hard headed and not politically sensitive, but there were others who were very sensitive and sound military commanders. Nickerson's replacement was Keith McCutcheon. Unfortunately, he died of cancer after only a short time as III MAF commander. Too bad. He was a very good man.

At about this point, the American military withdrawal began. Most of the Marines left Vietnam in 1970. Only the 1st Regiment with P.X. Kelley commanding remained for a time. Command in Danang was transferred to an Army general command 24th Corps.

Q: Would you tell me the story, if I recall it, about your dealings with the Marine general and some Chinese fishermen. Do you recall that? At least you told me they had picked up some Chinese fishermen from mainland China, which at that time was a Communist country, and as I recall it, maybe I'm wrong, the Marines had put them in the stockade and treated them as prisoners of war.

MCNAMARA: Probably, but I don't remember now. But there were all sorts of bizarre happenings during my tour.

Q: What was your impression of the reporting system, now that you were a reporting officer, among other things, that you were getting from other places at that particular time? Nixon had come in. We were beginning the scaling down. It was just the beginning. In fact, rather quickly we were moving down.

MCNAMARA: One of the big problems that I had, I felt, was that my reports went to Saigon and people in Saigon decided what to do with them. They might send them on to Washington or they might not. More often than not, they would not. That was a problem for me. I felt this was wrong. It smacked of censorship. Maybe it wasn't conscious, but it was there. The reports should have been sent on routinely; they were not. Later on, when the four consulates general were set up, the reports went automatically to Washington. At that point, when we started talking about the withdrawal and scaling things down, I suggested (it was really my suggestion) that we set up four independent consulates general, one in each corps area. Being consul in Danang, it occurred to me, where it probably wouldn't have occurred to anybody else, simply because I was in that kind of position. They were saying the military had to leave. Under the kinds of agreements being negotiated we would not be able to have a military presence outside Saigon. I suggested that we put all of our residual activities under an umbrella consulate general in each corps area, and civilianize the whole operation that way. Ultimately, that's what they did. Bunker remembered my suggestion and implemented it.

As they were drawing down troop levels, they were putting people out of work. An awful lot of Vietnamese were working for various American activities, either directly or in a secondary way. I could see that we were going to have a really serious unemployment problem and, as a result, a political problem. We had mountains of piasters in our local currency accounts that we couldn't use for anything outside the country, and we couldn't find very much to use them for in the country that wasn't highly inflationary. You had to be very careful.

Well, I pointed out that unemployment was going to become a real problem during a transition period. I documented it by going around to all of the employers in Danang, using them as a sample and showing how the drawdown would affect employment. I then suggested that we could alleviate the unemployment problem by developing a program of labor-intensive public works projects. Cleaning sewers, paving roads, and many other public work could sop-up a large portion of the unemployed in labor intensive projects. At the same time money would be pumped into the economy from our piaster account.

There was a lot of resistance from USAID. A lady economist at USAID insisted that there would be no problem. The Vietnamese extended family, she claimed, will take care of unemployed members. I pointed out that in many families all the bread earners might be out of work.

My suggestion did get to Washington. Moreover, it aroused the interest of the Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bill Sullivan.

Q: William Sullivan.

MCNAMARA: Yes. He took it up with me when I arrived in Washington. Ultimately, my plan was implemented. When I came back in 1974, it was functioning in all of the main cities.

Q: When did you leave Vietnam?

MCNAMARA: I left in August 1971.

Q: What was the feeling at that time from your Vietnamese contacts? There had been a sizable drawdown of troops. We had gone from almost half a million down to, what, 30,000 or something.

MCNAMARA: No, it wasn't that small by that time.

Q: But it was way down.

MCNAMARA: It was going down. By that time, it probably wasn't any more than 200,000. Maybe less than that.

Q: What was the feeling?

MCNAMARA: The Vietnamese were very nervous. They lacked self-confidence. I had little faith in Vietnamization myself. I didn't think that they would be capable, alone, of dealing with the northerners.

By this time, the country was pacified, by and large. In 1970, I went to Saigon where I picked up a Ford Scout vehicle. I then drove down to the Mekong delta, all the way down to the southern most point at Camau. From Camau I then headed north all the length of the Republic to Quang-tri and the DMZ.

Q: Quang-tri, my God. Really from one end to the other.

MCNAMARA: Yes, I went right from one end of the country, as it was then, to the other. It was the first time that an American civilian had done it since before Tet. I took two reporters with me, one guy from Time and another from The Washington Post. We didn't hear a shot fired in anger the whole way. We even visited Da-lat. We then went down the mountains from Da-lat to Phan-rang, and then up to Nha-Trang. All along the way we heard, from all sorts of people, even American and Vietnamese, that, "security was fine in my district, but the one just to the north is bad news. You're going to have trouble there." The populated parts of the country were pacified. Tet and the Phoenix program had destroyed the indigenous VC. The sanctuaries in Cambodia had been over run and the North Vietnamese had withdrawn, to a large extent back to North Vietnam. They were biding their time waiting for the Americans to complete their withdrawal. They knew that they could not handle the American heavy fire power. They launched their next offensive in 1972 when the Americans had virtually completed the withdrawal of their ground combat units. American air power coupled with Vietnamese elite units like the Airborne and the Marine stopped them in Quang-tri.

Q: Where did you go from Vietnam?

MCNAMARA: I went to the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island.

Q: Today is June 3, 1993. Terry, you went to the Naval War College from when to when?

MCNAMARA: It was from August 1971 to July 1972.

Q: Can you characterize the class?

MCNAMARA: There were about 250 people in my class. They were mainly senior officers in the armed forces. About half of the class were Navy and Marine officers, at the grades of Navy Commander/Captain and Marine Lieutenant Colonel/Colonel. The other half of the class was composed of officers from the Air Force, and the Army. We also had a few civilians including three of us from the State Department. Others were from the CIA, USIA, NSA, etc.

Q: Did the Vietnam situation pretty well take up most of the time?

MCNAMARA: No, we discussed many other things. Nonetheless, Vietnam was never far from our minds. Most of us had been to Vietnam. In fact, there were people in the class that I had known in Vietnam. Vietnam was preoccupying; it was a central theme of discussion. The submarine officers were the only sizable group with personal knowledge of the war. Among the surface navy officer, there were some who had served in the "brown water navy" in the rivers and canals of the Mekong delta. Those who had been offshore, of course, didn't have much idea of Vietnam. The naval aviators, however, were very much involved in the war. They had taken heavy losses. The attack pilots had all flown missions over North Vietnam, had been in great danger, and had been deeply involved in the war. There were also a few Seabee officers, who obviously had served in Vietnam. The Marines, of course, had all served in Vietnam, as had the Army officers, and a large portion of the Air Force types.

Q: Was there any feeling about how things were going there?

MCNAMARA: At that time, things were going well on the ground. The North Vietnamese had been beaten on the ground in Vietnam after the Tet Offensive. The Viet Cong infrastructure had surfaced during Tet and been identified. Consequently, they were no longer able to operate among the people in a clandestine way. Then the Phoenix Program came in and further disrupted the Viet Cong infrastructure. The North Vietnamese had been driven into the hills and across the border by military operations after the Tet Offensive, including the incursions into Cambodia. Most of my classmates were very optimistic. Then, of course, the withdrawals of American troops were taking place.

I remember going to Paris in 1970, while I was still in Danang. Phil Habib was there in charge of our delegation at the peace talks. The talks themselves were going nowhere at the time. Phil had weekly meetings with the North Vietnamese delegation but no business was being transacted. Charlie Whitehouse was in Paris at the same time. We were both "consulting" with the peace mission people. Actually, it was nice to pass through Paris on the way home from Vietnam.

Both of us were stationed in Vietnam at the time. I was the principal officer in Danang, and he was the deputy for CORDS in III Corps. I recall Charlie telling Phil that Vietnamization was going well and that the Vietnamese would be able to deal with the North Vietnamese.

Phil was very skeptical and asked me what I thought? I said, "Well, I really don't think that Vietnamization will succeed. I don't think that the South Vietnamese can handle the North Vietnamese if we're not there."

I must admit that it looked good at the time. The North Vietnamese had been beaten on the ground. But their tactic was obvious: they were retiring across the border or into the hinterland, into the mountains, and waiting, believing that we would leave. Why fight toe-to-toe with our incredibly powerful military machine? They had learned a harsh lesson. Rather, they reckoned that all they had to do was patiently await our departure. They were confident in their ability to deal with a much weaker South Vietnam without having to worry about the strength of the American military machine. For domestic political reasons, we were withdrawing, and their strategy was winning. Their strategy was to be patient and to outwait us, and when we left, then to come back into the war. And that's precisely what they did.

But that was not the perception of a lot of the military, and that was not the general perception of the mission in Vietnam.

Q: When you were in Newport at the Naval War College, were you getting any reflections about what was happening to society because of the Vietnam War, and also how the military felt about what was happening to the military on this?

MCNAMARA: Well, the military was embittered by its experience in Vietnam. My classmates generally felt that they had been let down. They felt that they hadn't been given proper political support (1) by the politicians, and (2) by the people. They were feeling pretty bitter about the whole experience. Too many constraints had been placed on them. The war had been unnecessarily prolonged and many soldiers killed unnecessarily. That the problem wasn't the Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese, whom they felt they had beaten militarily on the ground. The problems were political, and that the problems had been badly handled by the politicians. So they were embittered.

The draft had ended at about the time I was in Newport. Suddenly, the large anti-war demonstrations also ended. Clearly, this was not coincidental. The war hadn't ended, but the demonstrations ended. I wonder why? It seemed pretty obvious at the time that it had something to do with whether or not Johnny was going to have to go to war or not. It had very little to do with the ethics of sending half a million American soldiers to a little country on the other side of the world. It had to do with very narrow, selfish reasons: Johnny might have to go to war, and he might have to put his life at risk, and therefore he and his parents and his brothers and sisters and all his friends were against the war, because they didn't want to see Johnny go. It had very little to do with the morals of the war itself. There certainly were dissenters who took a genuine moral stance against the war. But they were a tiny minority. Otherwise, surely the large demonstrations would have continued.

Q: After the war college, where did you go?

MCNAMARA: I was looking for a job. I didn't want to serve in Washington.

Q: Were you married at this time?

MCNAMARA: No, I was single.

Q: I don't want to get into all the personalities, but you talked a lot about helping deliver babies, and your wife was very much a part of your...

MCNAMARA: Oh, I'd been married, but I got divorced before I went to Vietnam. I was divorced early in 1967, almost a year before I went to Vietnam. So I was single while I was there.

I was looking for my next assignment, and they didn't seem to be able to find anything very attractive. Finally, I was offered a job as DCM in a little country in Africa called Dahomey, later called Benin. I was hoping that I'd get a better assignment than that after having been lauded for the job I had done as principal officer in Danang. But, that was all that was being offered. I had no option but to accept my fate in good humor.

On my way to Dahomey, I passed through Paris. Dahomey's relations with their former colonial masters was especially close.

The Dehumanize, especially the people in the south of the country, are well educated by African standards. In fact, Dahomey was called the Quarried Latin of Africa because of the number of intellectuals the country had produced.

It's a funny little country. It's very much like Nigeria in microcosm, divided into three major regions-the east, the west, and the north. The basis of the divisions is tribe and religion. In the east, there is a tribe, centered on Porto-Novo, the old capital of the country, which is an offshoot of the Yoruba in Nigeria. In the west, you have the FSN tribe. The traditional kingdom of Dahomey was based on the Fon tribe. During the 19th century, the French, when they finally took over Dahomey as a colony, had a very short military campaign against the Fon kingdom. The Fon kings were guarded by an Amazon guard made up of tough female warriors. But the French had no trouble taking over Dahomey, despite the martial reputation of the Dahomians. Muslims dominate in the north. They are closely allied to the Hausa in Nigeria. Because of these ethnic and religious divisions, the country remains very unstable. Indeed, there had been 8 or 9 coup d'etats during the 12 years since independence in 1960.

Q: You went out when?

MCNAMARA: I went out in September of 1972. On my way out, I passed through Paris. The ambassador in Dahomey, Bob Anderson, was also in Paris. And he and I and the Africa-watcher in Paris at the time, Tony Quainton, went to the Quai d'Orsay to talk to the man who was in charge of Africa. He'd been ambassador, I think in Tunisia, prior to coming to this job at the Quai. He said that the French were very worried, and that they'd had indications of an impending coup d'etat in Dahomey. Anderson pooh-poohed this. I remember his saying, "Oh, no, it won't happen. That's nonsense." When we left the Quai, Quainton and I walked back to the embassy. Anderson had gone off on his own. As we walked we talked about what the Frenchman had told us about the possibility of a coup d'etat. I told Quainton that he should report our conversation.

He said, "But the ambassador doesn't agree."

I rejoined, "Well, maybe not, but surely the French have excellent sources in Dahomey. Just to be on the same side, I would report it."

So he said, "Yeah, I think you're right."

As far as I am aware, he reported the coup prediction. The Department, therefore, was not caught unawares when the coup later took place.

It was a dusty little town with large numbers of unemployed. A well-educated population, certainly by African standards, yet not enough jobs for the educated who had completed a good lycée education. Some of them had even finished university in France. There just weren't any jobs for them. This was a major factor in the country's chronic instability. Not only was there serious ethnic and religious differences, but there was a large group of unemployed, educated, unhappy people in the capital.

So, a deputy assistant secretary for Africa named Smith arrived on a visit just after I got to Dahomey.

Q: Yes, there were a couple of Robert Smiths, and one was from AID. I'm not sure if it was Robert S., but anyway, Robert Smith.

MCNAMARA: To try to deal with the chronic instability and the fractiousness of the country, the Dahomians had decided upon a bizarre system of government. They chose three presidents representing the three major divisions of the country. These three formed a collective executive. The position of head of state rotated among them. Each one came from a different region: the east, the west, and the north. I'm not sure, but I think the northerner had already served his term as chief of state, and at this point, Ahomadĩ ȳ ȳ gbĩ ȳ ȳ, from the west, was the chief of state. Ahomadĩ ȳ ȳ gbĩ ȳ ȳ invited Smith to visit the old Fon royal capital at Abomey. Both the Ambassador and I were along on the trip. We had spent the day touring the town and being entertained by traditional dancers wearing tilts. Suddenly Ahomadĩ ȳ ȳ gbĩ ȳ ȳ came to us and said, "You've got to get right back to Cotonou. It looks as though there's going to be trouble. I don't want anything to happen to you. Get in the car and go right now. I think I can protect you. You'll be all right if you leave now and get back to Cotonou." So we left in a great hurry. The high speed drive back only took about two hours.

It then became obvious that there was a real threat of a coup d'etat. In any case, these things had happened so often in the past that it should have come as no surprise to anybody that there was likely to be another coup d'etat in Dahomey.

Nothing happened for a day or two. Smith left the country and I was settling into the embassy routine. After lunch one day, I was returning to the embassy...

Q: The ambassador wasn't there at the time?

MCNAMARA: Yes, he was there but he had injured his foot and was staying in the residence. I was returning from lunch on a side road. When I came to the main road that came from Ouidah and the Togo border, there was a small military convoy passing. I waited till they passed, and I pulled in behind them. An officer in a Jeep at the end of the convoy made signs to me to slow down and stop. I thought, "I've got to get back to the office. I don't see any reason why I shouldn't proceed behind these guys. I won't pass them. Maybe that's what he means." I couldn't understand why he seemed to be so nervous. As we were driving along, the head of the convoy came abreast of the presidential palace. Suddenly, the lead armored car turned to the right, into the driveway going into the palace, broke through the big wrought-iron gates into the grounds of the palace, and started firing machine guns. That was the beginning of the coup. I had a ringside seat.

Q: You were part of it, part of the armored convoy.

MCNAMARA: I was right there; I saw the whole thing happen. There was some shooting back, but not very much. I waited until the shooting died down. Then I went to the embassy and told the ambassador. He was immobile having injured his leg playing tennis. I then sent a cable alerting the Department of the coup. It was a classic coup. The streets were empty and martial music was being played on the radio. Anderson couldn't leave his house, so I brought information and draft messages to him before sending them to Washington. Finally, we were getting no new information and were without a clear idea of what was happening. I told Anderson that I thought I should do a reconnaissance around town. I was used to such things from Vietnam, Elisabethville and Dar es Salaam. He agreed. "You may take my car and driver," he said. I got the chauffeur to put the American flag on the car because driving around town, I wanted to be sure the car was clearly marked to avoid somebody shooting at me. We drove around town very slowly. The roads were empty aside from soldiers manning road blocks or guarding government buildings. None of them bothered us. They were nervous when they stopped us, but they didn't bother us. When I returned to the embassy, Anderson found out that I flew the flag on the car. He was furious. "Only the ambassador has the right to fly the flag!" He shouted making a complete ass of himself. I explained as calmly as I could why I had used the flag. He finally quieted down.

Q: Oh, God, I find that...

MCNAMARA: Really childish. But, anyway, that was his way.

Q: I take it, from what you say, this wasn't the most comfortable relationship.

MCNAMARA: No, I got along fine with him. I suppose I am one of the few people who worked for him who has ever gotten along well with him. He needed me, and I tried never to be threatening. I did all the work, while he played tennis. He also absented himself from Cotonou as often as possible. He didn't want to be there, really.

Q: What was his specialty?

MCNAMARA: France. He had been the political counselor at the embassy in Paris when Watson, from IBM, was made ambassador. In a fit of temper, Watson cleaned out the embassy hierarchy. He fired the DCM; he fired the political counselor, Anderson; he fired the economic counselor; and he got rid of the consul general. He just cleaned them all out, and promoted their deputies who were much too junior for the principal embassy posts. When Anderson was fired from Paris, his friends in the Department got him the ambassadorship in Cotonou. Africa was of no interest to him. He was appalled by having to go to Africa, even as ambassador. He was really focused on France and French politics. His ambition was to be the minister, the DCM, in Paris. He was hoping that that would be his next job. The post as political counselor should have led to the DCMship. Watson ended Anderson's dreams of glory on the Place de Concorde.

Q: Watson himself eventually got fired for...

MCNAMARA: Propositioning an air hostess.

Q: It was a drinking problem, wasn't it?

MCNAMARA: As I recall he was on a flight returning to the U.S. with his son. He had a few too many drinks and offered money to one of the hostesses if she would sleep with his son. I am not sure I have the story absolutely right. In any case, the scandal was hot enough to end his diplomatic career. He might have gotten away with such things as an IBM tycoon. But he wasn't just an IBM tycoon, he was the American ambassador in Paris. Anyway, it got into the newspapers.

Q: And he was gone.

MCNAMARA: And he was gone, it was very embarrassing for the administration.

Q: Terry, at the time, what did you see as American interests in Dahomey?

MCNAMARA: Almost none. You'd have been hard put to find any interest, aside from sentimental ones. Quidah was an old, well-known slaving port. Obviously, a lot of black Africans were taken through Quidah to the United States, or what became the United States. From that point of view, there was a cultural and sentimental tie. Other than that, there wasn't any interest of any consequence. Dahomey had nothing in terms of natural resources. The French were the dominant outside force. We recognized this, if not overtly, implicitly, in everything we did. The country was dirt poor with no strategic importance. The only importance for the United States was cultural and sentimental.

Q: Well, while you were there, you had a coup, and one rushes around, but is this mainly to keep busy?

MCNAMARA: Well, when you have a coup in a country, and you're there at the embassy, obviously you report it. It's of some limited interest to the State Department, to the people who deal with that particular country in the State Department. They want to hear about it when there's a coup. It's also of some passing interest to others. Dahomey is geographically next to Nigeria, and Nigeria was important to us because of its oil. Moreover, it is the biggest country in black Africa. Nonetheless, nothing in Black Africa is of great interest to the U.S.

Q: Because of the prevalence of coups, was there almost a coup procedure as far as the embassy was concerned?

MCNAMARA: Not that I know of.

Q: Did you have any problems reestablishing contact with the new ruling people and all that?

MCNAMARA: Not a great deal. However, this was a new group. This coup was a little different from the previous coups, because it was staged by relatively junior officers in the military. Previously, the coups had been staged by the senior officers. This time, people who were unknown to us, or to anybody else, had suddenly come up from the ranks and staged the coup.

There were two principal coup makers: one was the captain of the lone parachute unit in the small Dahomian army, and the other was the commander of the armored-car unit. Both were young captains and had been at Saint-Cyr, the French military academy. They were very much different from the kind of people who had staged the previous coups-the old boys in the army, who were mainly former sergeants from the French colonial army who had been commissioned just prior to independence. Obviously, when they formed a national army, these were the only people who were available to officer it. But these younger men, who had had a proper military education, looked down on the more senior people, whom they saw as uneducated, unsophisticated, and coming from a colonial tradition. Oddly enough, neither one of the captains assumed top leadership. Precisely why, I'm not sure.

They put a man named Kĩĩrĩĩkou in as president. He was involved in the coup, but was not, as far as I know, one of the principal initial leaders of the coup. He was put up as the front man, because he may have been the most senior person involved. Also, he was a northerner while the two captains were from the south. Kĩĩrĩĩkou was a major and had been a sergeant in the colonial army.

The two captains became ministers; they and a lot of other young officers took over portfolios as ministers. At first, we had some difficulty in getting to know them, but eventually we did. The relationship was always a little strained. It was never the easy relationship we'd had with the previous governments. These gents, I think, distrusted us and were unsure of themselves. They were also very nationalistic. We didn't have the easy access and the easy personal and professional relationships that we'd had with the previous governments.

Q: Were there any other developments until you left?

MCNAMARA: Yes, a couple of things. The regime started getting more and more radical. Some of the young officers were Marxists, or at least interested in Marxism. They wished to break the neo-colonial connections with the French, and, by extension, with us. The French, however, were the principal target. The French still had tremendous leverage in Dahomey. Among other things, they supplied a subsidy to the Dahomian government. Without that subsidy, it was difficult to run a country in chronic deficit. To meet civil service payroll, they often had to ask for help from the French.

Anyway, the regime became increasingly radicalized, and Kiꜛ½rĩꜛ½kou showed more and more signs of being unstable. Surprisingly, he began to emerge as the clear leader of the government. He assumed more and more personal power. The young captains and their friends who had organized the coup were on the decline.

Another thing happened not long before I left. Anderson left to become the Department spokesperson for Henry Kissinger. I was left as charg   d'affaires for the best part of a year. They had a lot of trouble identifying a new ambassador. Then the country director delayed the new Ambassador's arrival in Cotonou until I was just about ready to leave, because he thought I deserved a prolonged tour as charg   d'affaires. We had become good friends.

The Sahelian drought hit while I was acting as chargé d'affaires. Cotonou became one of the principal ports of entry for supplies for the countries in the interior-Mali and Niger. We organized an effective transport system, despite the rickety facilities that Cotonou possessed. One, the port didn't function very well. Also, they had a single-track railway that went to Natelougu in the middle of the country. From there, goods were transshipped onto trucks and carried up to Niger and to Mali. There were serious bottlenecks in these points of transfer. The port was not efficient and the transshipment in Natelougu was primitive and time consuming. The road to Niger was dirt. In the rainy season, it developed potholes, especially with constant heavy traffic moving over it.

When the crisis hit, I got money from AID and hired some Peace Corps volunteers who were terminating from the Peace Corps to act as expeditors. I put a couple of them in the port, and a couple of them at the transshipment point. They proved effective in expediting the unloading of ships and dispatch of rail wagons. At the transshipment point, they worked equally well in unloading rail cars and loading trucks. Ultimately, we had the most efficient port on the coast, in terms of grain and foodstuffs coming in and being shipped up into the interior. In addition to the Americans, the World Food Program representative, a Belgian, was very effective. We worked together as a team.

I also got some money from AID to pay for patching of the road to Niger. We gave the money to the Dahomian government who cooperated as well as they could with their limited resources. Unfortunately, the AID engineer who came to look into the grant of money used the wrong exchange rate, and gave them far too little money. The Dahomians had to eat a lot of the expense themselves. During the heavy rains, I patrolled the road in a car filling the potholes with a shovel, and reacting to any slow down with immediate heat. We kept the grain moving.

When the crisis first began, a UN delegation arrived in Cotonou. One member was a particularly obnoxious Englishman, with a double-barreled name. He had been involved in all of the Sahelian crises. I noticed his name again recently in relation to Somalia. He started throwing his weight around, half drunk most of the time. Simplistically, he decided that the only way to move grain was by airplane without first looking into what was already being done.

The Canadians were asked to provide aircraft. Being the nice, naive people that they are, they offered five or six C-130s. The Englishman then came to me demanding, "You've got to get this grain out to the airport."

I informed him that, "All the grain in the port was already on a train bound for the interior. It will be in Niger within a week," I promised.

Very agitated, he insisted that we recall the train and send the grain to the airport for shipment by aircraft.

I refused. It would have taken far longer to fly the grain to Niger than it would have taken on the train-truck route. Moreover, the cost was infinitely cheaper.

He was furious that we would not unload a train for him so that he could play air marshal.

As the grain moved through the port in Cotonou the rainy season began. I frantically sought tarpaulins to cover the grain so that it would not spoil. Finally, I found tarps in Nigeria that we purchased and brought back to Dahomey.

Cotonou was more successful in moving grain to the Sahel than any other port on the West African coast. There were awful stories from Dakar and Abidjan of mountains of grain germinating on the docks, left in the open without proper cover for long periods.

An Indian from FAO, who was in overall charge of the movement of grain to the Sahel and our airplane man decided that a conference was needed to discuss the problem rather than doing something about it. At great expense, a conference was called bringing people from all over West Africa, Rome, Washington, New York, etc. Sadly, this was a typical UN response. Cotonou was chosen as a site for the conference because of our success in moving grain without losing vast amounts to spoilage. I was invited to the conference.

After hours of long-winded, theoretic discussion I intervened calling on the conferees to stop talking and to roll up their sleeves, "Action rather than talk is needed." My interjection got a mixed reception. The practical doers liked it. The professional international conference goers were furious. A USAID type from Washington denounced me later as being insensitive to devoted UN civil servants.

The Sahelian crisis ended for us in Cotonou just as I was coming up for reassignment at the end of my two year tour. A personnel officer from Washington named Don Norland called me.

Q: Who?

MCNAMARA: His name was Don Norland.

Q: Oh, yes, I've interviewed him.

MCNAMARA: At the time, I was an FSO-3, in the old system.

Q: Sort of the equivalent of a colonel.

MCNAMARA: Yes. In the new system the old class 3 is an FS-1. It is at the top of the middle grades. Norland offered me a posting as the minerals attaché½ in Johannesburg.

I was stunned. I told him that I knew nothing of geology.

He reassured me that the Department of the Interior would give me a crash 3-4 month course in geology and mining.

I asked, "Why me?"

Norland replied that I was "an economist."

"Well, I'm not really an economist," I countered, "I've been an economic officer. That is not the same thing."

In any case, he insisted, "We want you to be the minerals attaché½."

I told him I was not interested and asked what other assignments might be available. Norland never gave me any alternative. He intensified his hard sell with descriptions of the marvelous opportunity I would have. I might even become Acting Consul General in Johannesburg when the consul general was out of town, he offered as the ultimate enticement. In the meantime, the country director for West Africa called me and asked if I would be interested in going back to Vietnam as consul general in Can Tho. He said that Graham Martin was looking for a suitable person to take the job as consul general in Can Tho. He had been looking for some six months without success. The job was rated as an FSO-1 (Minister Counselor) which was two grades above my own grade at the time. The people that the Department suggested to him, he wouldn't have, and the people he wanted, he couldn't get. As you will recall, I had been a principal officer in Danang. Although I may have been junior in terms of my grade, I had much pertinent experience for the job as principal officer in another post in Vietnam.

The country director, knew Martin. He had served under him in Italy. He offered to speak to Martin on my behalf, if I wished to have the job. I assured John that I would be happy to go to Can Tho, especially to a job with a two grade stretch. Such a stretch, at a senior level, almost never happens. It would be a great boost for my career. Moreover, I viewed the alternative being offered in Johannesburg as a definite career side track.

I told Norland that I wanted to see whether the job in Vietnam would be offered before deciding on any other possibilities. He assured me that I was not going to get that job. "You're only an FSO-3. That's a class one job. We are going to put a senior officer in that job. You're not going to get it, so you may as well take the job in Johannesburg and be happy with it." I continued to demur. My friend continued to speak to Graham Martin on my behalf. Graham Martin, at this point, was in Washington defending the AID program with Congress. After a week or so of indecision, I suddenly received orders to leave immediately for Vietnam. I was told to be in Vietnam in a week's time. At the time I was chargé d'affaires in Cotonou. There was nobody at the embassy that I could easily turnover the post to. I called personnel in Washington to tell them that I could not go right away. The new ambassador was not coming until the following month. The person next in seniority to me at post was a newly arrived administrative officer.

The personnel officer told me flatly, "We don't care what you do, just get out of there."

I replied lamely that, "The next person in line is the admin officer, who has just arrived. He's never been in Africa before."

The reply was, "Make him the chargé d'affaires, and just get out of there. You've got to pass through the Department, talk to Graham Martin, and then get to Saigon all in a week's time."

"Yes sir," I answered. With some concern I turned over the post to the admin officer, who was in shock. I packed all my gear and sent it to Vietnam, including a collection of African artifacts which was later lost in the evacuation.

Before leaving I had a great party in the house that Anderson's wife built. She was a great woman. I loved her. She was a fine woman. Anyway, she had built a beautiful residence. It was her project, and she did a great job. I had many African friends including musicians from some of the local nightclubs. They also came and played free of charge as a going away present. Some of the more traditional members of the diplomat corps were shocked. The French ambassador just couldn't believe what he was seeing; all those young black bodies gyrating around a formal residence. Nothing like that had ever happened in Cotonou before.

I then left and drove in the ambassadorial sedan to Nigeria. My friend, Earl Bellinger, who was the admin counselor poured me on board a Swissair flight after I spent a day celebrating with my Nigerian friends.

I came directly to Washington to talk to Graham Martin. We spoke for about a half an hour. He looked over my record. He'd already seen it and knew that I'd been a principal officer in Danang. He talked to me and approved of me.

Q: Did he ask you any questions about your impressions of whither Vietnam?

MCNAMARA: No, he didn't ask me questions like that. He just made it absolutely clear that I wasn't to interfere with the CIA's operation in Can Tho.

After my assignment was blessed by Martin, I went on my way with a brief stop in Hawaii. My children were living there, and I saw them. I also had briefings at CINCPAC before leaving for Saigon. Amazingly, I made it in a week's time, from Cotonou to Saigon. The reason they wanted me there so quickly was that they were having a meeting in Saigon of the four consuls general from the four corps. It was supposed to be a big confab, a mission conference to brief the consuls general (who were a little bit like feudal barons). In turn, they briefed the embassy on what was going on in their areas. We were also meant to discuss the problems.

When I arrived Lacy Wright, an old friend from my previous tours in Vietnam, was the acting consul general in Can Tho. Wolfgang Lehmann, whom you might know, was the DCM in Saigon. He had been consul general in Can Tho. Martin brought him up to Saigon, and then was never able to find anybody that suited him to replace Wolfgang in Can Tho until he found me.

The conference was interesting. We had briefings, which I thought were incredibly naive, especially one by Frank Snepp of the CIA, on the political situation.

Q: He wrote a book later.

MCNAMARA: Not much of a book. Anyway, I'll talk to you about that at a later time.

Martin, of course, was still in the United States, as he was through most of that period. He was in the unhappy position of having to defend the administration's policy of supporting the Vietnamese. Henry Kissinger, who at that time was Secretary of State, was avoiding association with a situation he saw as a loser. Nor was anyone else prepared to stick their necks out. So they left the defense of support for Vietnam in the hands of the ambassador, who should have been in Saigon, but wasn't. Martin spent much of his time in 1974-'75 in Washington, fighting the bureaucratic fight on the Hill.

Before I left Washington, I had talked to Jim Bullington, who was serving on the Vietnam desk. We had known each other in Vietnam. Jim was almost captured in Hue during the Tet attacks. He was hidden by a Vietnamese priest. At this time, Jim was working on the Vietnam Desk. As a friend and fellow old Vietnam hand, he told me: "It's all finished. They're not going to be able to hold out. The regime is going to collapse, and the North is going to take over." He was very pessimistic. And, of course, he was right. Most others I talked to in Washington and even in Saigon were more optimistic. No one predicted that the end would come as quickly as it did in 1975.

I remember Ken Quinn, who's now the deputy assistant secretary for East Asia and the Pacific, was in the White House working for the NSC. We were also old friends from Vietnam. Just before coming back to Washington, he had served in the Consulate General in Can Tho. He congratulated me on getting such a marvelous job. We did not talk much about politics. Rather, he told me what a great job I was going to have as consul general. He said, "You've got a huge territory, with much autonomy and great power as Consul General. It will be a great job for you." And it was; he was absolutely right. Quinn also briefed me on social delights that were in store for me as a bachelor. This was my White House briefing.

My briefing in Saigon was disappointing

My first impression of Lehmann was bad. He appeared to be pompous, opinionated and lacking in real understanding of Vietnam and the Vietnamese. On longer acquaintance, he confirmed my initial impression of a foolish man who thought he knew a great deal about Vietnam on the basis of some six-eight months' experience in Can Tho. In fact, he understood very little. I was further shocked to learn that I was the only one of the consuls general who had any serious previous Vietnam experience.

Martin's greatest weakness was to surround himself with sycophants. He chose people for their supposed loyalty to him. He'd been in Italy, Thailand, and Korea. His principal subordinates were almost all people whom he had known in other places. Few of them had previous experience in Vietnam. This was a serious weakness that was hard to justify. By this time, we had a large number of people with long experience of Vietnam. Surprisingly, prior to my arrival, none of them occupied one of these key jobs as consuls general. Moreover, his DCM had only been in the delta for six months. His understanding of his surroundings seemed superficial at best. In relatively junior jobs, at the embassy, however, there were many experienced, old hands. I did not have the impression that they were much listened to by their seniors.

A few old hands had survived. Colonel "Jake" Jacobson was still there as mission coordinator, but I don't know how much he was listened to on substantive things. I think he dealt more with operational aspects of the remnants of the CORDS network. But he was certainly a man of considerable knowledge, and experience. He met me at the airport when I arrived; he came out and picked me off the airplane and brought me into Saigon. We had known one another during my earlier tours, but we became good friends and allies while I was in Can Tho.

In short, Martin's choice of subordinates was not brilliant. He picked them mainly for their personal loyalty to him. I'm not sure what it was, but most seemed without depth in terms of their understanding of what was going on in the country. This was true of the Mission's top leadership both in the embassy and on the CIA side.

Q: This consul general situation of developing little feudal baronies was sort of unique. After the American military pullout in Vietnam, what were they doing, and particularly what were you doing? What was the reason for these consuls general?

MCNAMARA: In about 1970 or '71, we were beginning our withdrawing. People were talking about an agreement with the North that would involve a complete withdrawal of American military forces from Vietnam. At the time, I was principal officer of the consulate in Danang. I suggested in a message to Saigon, that we set up consulates general in each one of the four corps areas. Under these civilian umbrellas, we could place all of the residual American activities left in Vietnam, outside Saigon. Apparently my suggestion was not forgotten. When the Accords worked out between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho were implemented, we set up four consulates general as I had foreseen. Under the Accords, no American military were to be stationed in the country outside Saigon. Instead, the CG's took over responsibility for all of the continuing U.S. activities. These included: road building, agricultural support activities, public health services and education. In fact, it encompassed support for all of the governmental and developmental activities being carried out by the government of Vietnam. In addition, American support for the Vietnamese military had not ended. We continued to provide essential logistics support which was monitored by the consulates general. We also gave military advice and intelligence. Finally, we had field personnel searching for the remains of MIA. While there were no Americans taking part in military operations, we were still providing advice and massive logistics support. All of these activities, where we'd had huge establishments previously, were put under the consuls general.

Can Tho, in the Mekong delta, where I was, was the biggest and wealthiest of the regions. Indeed, it was the prize of the war.

Q: This is the rice bowl.

MCNAMARA: It had been the rice bowl of Southeast Asia. I had 16 offices, spread throughout the area. There were some 17 or 18 provinces in the delta. I had offices in all but one or two of them, with Americans resident in the offices. In all, I had about 1,000 employees.

Q: Good God!

MCNAMARA: Yes, it was a big organization. Most employees were Vietnamese, but I also had well over 100 Americans, as well as a sprinkling of Filipinos and Koreans.

Part of this large establishment was from the CIA. They maintained a certain separateness from the rest of the consulate general. In theory, we were supposed to be united under the overall direction of the consul general. In fact the CIA elements maintained both a psychological, as well as a physical separation. They still had their own compounds and separate logistical system. It was a hangover from the halcyon days when the CIA had a huge, semi-autonomous organization spread over the whole country.

Q: What was your impression of the CIA operation when you got to the field? You said you weren't very impressed by the briefing you got when you first arrived.

MCNAMARA: I was very depressed by it. It seemed amateurish. Moreover, it too was being run to a large extent by people without any real previous Vietnam experience. I arrived in Can Tho almost simultaneously with a new regional CIA chief. His previous experience had been in Korea and Laos. His deputy had come from Laos, as had some of the other people in his organization. The little war in Laos had been run by the CIA. However, its intensity and the quality of the enemy was much different than in Vietnam. Taking people from Laos was akin to putting sand-lot baseball players up against the New York Yankees. They were simply out of their league.

Q: I sort of sensed that the Foreign Service establishment (I'm speaking in the broadest sense-CIA and State Department) was beginning to run out of steam as far as Vietnam was concerned. So many of us went through there, but people were beginning to look elsewhere by this time.

MCNAMARA: Many were running for cover. People didn't want to go back. They didn't want to be associated with such an unpopular enterprise that might fail. I went back mainly because I was being offered a super job. By and large, I don't think that the personnel system in State or CIA were encouraging their best people to go to Vietnam. This reflected a general American disillusionment with Vietnam.

The war in Laos was really the Little Leagues. It was sandlot in comparison with the sophistication and the martial qualities of the Vietnamese Communist troops and their leadership. I have often heard that, in Laos, the nice relatively soft Laotians would often decide battles by how much noise each side made. Whoever made the most noise won the battle. Well, that certainly was not the case with the Vietnamese. They were tough, they were serious, they were world-class soldiers and very well led. This was the big leagues. Sadly, many of our personnel were no longer up to that level. Many were fine people, but they were out of their depth. They did not have sufficient seasoning in such harsh conditions and against such a formidable enemy. This was true of the embassy, and that was true of the CIA. Certainly, it was true of the CIA leadership that I had with me in the delta.

Q: What were they doing?

MCNAMARA: Its hard to know, because they kept an awful lot from me. They wouldn't share an awful lot. Theoretically, I was supposed to be seeing everything, but I know that I wasn't. One of their most egregious faults was sneaking behind my back in dealing with the corps commander. One day, I asked the regional CIA station chief why he was briefing the corps commander without my knowing it. The corps commander had asked me, "Who is in charge? Which one of you Americans is really in charge? You, or the CIA man? What's going on here?"

I assured him that I was in charge.

He then told me that the CIA man was telling him things that were quite different from what I told him. You people do not speak with one voice, he concluded.

When I got back to the CG, I summoned the CIA man to come to my office. I then asked him, "What the hell's going on? What are you telling the Corps commander?"

"Oh, I can't tell you."

"Why can't you tell me?" I asked.

"No, no, it's confidential," he panicked, "I am not able to discuss sources and methods with you."

Q: He could tell the Vietnamese corps commander.

MCNAMARA: And I said, "But you're telling a foreign official things that you can not tell me?"

"But he's one of our agents," the station chief asserted.

The situation was impossible. It was like Alice in Wonderland, dealing with these people. I couldn't get any sense out of him. I was not trying to run his operations for him, but I really had to know what he was doing. And what he was telling my counterpart to at least assure that the Americans were speaking with one voice. Otherwise, we would lose all credibility. Moreover, long experience had taught us that the Vietnamese would soon begin to play us one off against the other. Indeed, they were probably already doing so. It was insane to operate in such a divided way with one American element undercutting another.

Finally, I complained to Pulgar, who was the CIA station chief in Saigon. He assured me that I was in charge of the whole mission in Can Tho, including the CIA contingent. He very sanctimoniously assured me that he would straighten out my CIA man insisting that he keep me fully informed. Of course, that was bullshit. He told them nothing of the sort. This was play acting to assuage me.

I also complained to the DCM. He told me, "You just get along with them. You're making a mountain out of a molehill. This is nonsense. You're there to get along with everybody."

My situation was not a happy one. I was being lied to by the CIA and was left without support by my own superiors. Martin was absent during most of this period. Without the DCM's support, I had nowhere to turn.

Q: Well, Terry, as an old hand, I've found that an awful lot of the CIA operations depended on basically a payoff. They'd buy people. It sounds a lot fancier than it really was. And that is, you paid somebody and you expected them to be bought and stay bought. That was the sum and substance of most of the CIA operations.

MCNAMARA: Well, can I tell you, that's exactly what was happening. Except I am not sure these agents were staying bought. We were really in a ridiculous position. As a country we were completely bankrolling the South Vietnamese war effort. They should have and would have given us any information we demanded without further payment. We had agreements that they would share completely all of their intelligence and tactical information with us. Here we were, supporting the war. And although we'd pulled out our troops, we were still there, and we were essential to the conduct of the war. We could not operate effectively, even in terms of giving them the support they needed, if we didn't know precisely what was going on.

Let me go back. I had some very good, experienced guys there, especially the old CORDS people.

Q: These were Americans.

MCNAMARA: These were Americans, and some of them had been there in Vietnam for 12 or 15 years. Some were retired Army officers, very experienced people. Others were former Peace Corps volunteers. They had served elsewhere with Peace Corps, but most had been in Vietnam for 5 or 6 years and spoke Vietnamese. They were good, solid people. They lived in virtually all of the provinces, and had established excellent contacts with the local people, including their Vietnamese counterparts. Most of the time, they could get any information we needed. Moreover, they were, by and large, sophisticated enough to evaluate what they were being told.

Q: You're talking about the CIA?

MCNAMARA: No. I'm talking about the Vietnamese. Sometimes people like the military intelligence people would withhold things from the civilian military intelligence people who were assigned to me. They were employed by the Defense Attaché's Office in Saigon. They were retired Army officers who served as military intelligence officers in the provinces. They were supposed to have complete access to information, but sometimes the Vietnamese intelligence officers wouldn't share stuff with them. They would hold back hoping to sell to the CIA. At other times, they sold the same info to the CIA as they gave my people for nothing. The resource I had that was most reliable was the old CORDS people who were living out in the provinces and who were well plugged in. They came up with far better, more reliable information that cost us nothing. On the other hand, the CIA people would produce information that was often inaccurate. Few of them seemed to have an ability to evaluate information, or to judge the reliability of sources. In any case, they were most often paying for information we had a right to receive as a matter of course. They were subverting the whole system without improving the quality of information available to us.

Q: They were paying for it. With paid-for information, there is not only, you might say, the moral problem, but there also is the very practical problem that it's a commodity, and it can be pretty shoddy, but if there's a market for it, people will...

MCNAMARA: The Vietnamese informants were selling the CIA what they thought they wanted, whether the info was right or whether it was wrong didn't seem to make any difference.

A perfect example of this was an incident that occurred in Can Tho. The Vietnamese organized a conference. I was invited by the corps commander to all of the major conferences. He'd have his weekly briefing conferences, corps-level staff conferences and so on, and I would go as his counterpart, sitting next to him. This time, a man named Hoang Duc Nha, a nephew of Nguyen Van Thieu's and the President's principal political operator came for a special meeting. Obviously, they would be discussing domestic political questions.

Q: Nguyen Van Thieu was the president.

MCNAMARA: The president of the country. That morning, we had the long, regular weekly military briefing on what was going on in the corps area, the whole delta. I sat with the corps commander and participated in the conference, asking questions and discussing points of interest with the corps commander and his staff. In the afternoon, the corps commander drew me aside asking that I not attend. He explained that they would be discussing internal politics with Nha. It would not be proper to have a foreigner present.

I understood the General's point of view. As a good nationalist, he would find the presence of a foreigner repugnant. It was a point of view that was understandable and even admirable.

A day or two later, the CIA told me they were going to give me a briefing on what had gone on at the afternoon session. Earlier, I asked them to find out what went on in the closed portion of the meeting. To help them in their acquisition, targeting what was important and what wasn't, I'd said, "We really ought to find out, if we can, what went on in that afternoon meeting in which they were to discuss national tactics." Proudly, they prepared to demonstrate their prowess. A meeting was organized in a large conference room in the Consulate General. Their briefer commenced to describe what had happened at the morning conference I had attended. Finally, I stopped him saying that I had attended the morning meeting at which these subjects were discussed.

And they said, "No, this discussion took place in the afternoon."

I corrected the briefer-gently at first. When he insisted that his version of the meeting had taken place with Nha present in the afternoon, I asked whether they had repeated in the afternoon meeting exactly what was said in my presence in the morning.

The briefer and his bosses insisted that their version was correct because it came from their agents. I kept pressing them. Finally, I asked them to identify their agents?

The case officer then blurted out, "It was the Vu-graph operator."

Q: The what?

MCNAMARA: The Vu-graph operator. You know what a Vu-graph is?

Q: Oh, yes, it's an overhead projector.

MCNAMARA: He said, "It was the Vu-graph operator."

I found the level of gullibility incredible. The soldier sold them semi-public information assuming they would be taken in by it. I assured them that the Vietnamese would not have Vu-graphs at a sensitive discussion of political tactics. I couldn't believe it, that these guys could be that naive and that stupid that they would pay for such patently false information, especially as I had told them beforehand exactly what had happened at the morning meeting and my assumption of what would be the subjects of the afternoon session.

Q: Well, I think this is the pernicious thing that happens with CIA intelligence. One, it's paid for. But the other one is that it seems to come from a source that is so much more exalted than what is developed by people out on the ground talking to people in the normal course of events. It takes on a mystique of its own, which, often, at certain levels in the government, people pay more attention to. And it can be wrong as hell, because it ends up depending on the integrity and the position of a Vu-graph operator, maybe.

MCNAMARA: Well, the guy was selling them what he figured they'd be naive enough to take.

Q: And also what he knew.

MCNAMARA: That's right, he wasn't there that afternoon at the political discussion. They wouldn't have Vu-graphs when they were having a serious discussion on political tactics.

Q: Incidentally, just to put it in frame, when did you arrive in Can Tho, and when did you leave?

MCNAMARA: I arrived August-September 1974, and I left on the 19th of April, '75.

Q: Okay, now we'll go back.

MCNAMARA: The Foreign Service inspectors came to Can Tho in February 1975. The head of the inspection team was Bill Bradford. He was an old administrative officer from Africa. I think he was the head of AF/EX at one time. Ultimately, he became an ambassador in Chad.

Q: I think so, too. I think I've interviewed him.

MCNAMARA: Well, he did the consulate. I told him that the division in our mission between CIA and others is potentially dangerous. If we don't speak with one voice and have a single chain of command, we could have great difficulty should we have to evacuate or find ourselves in some other crisis. He promised that he would put my forebodings in his report. I never saw the report. But I saw him after the evacuation; he was working on the resettlement of the refugees. He assured me that my predictions of trouble had been put in his report. "I've got it in my papers. What you foresaw was borne out by subsequent events." Things that have been written about the terrible divisions in Saigon during the final days were repeated in Can Tho. I don't know what happened in other corps areas.

I tried desperately to build and enforce a unity of command. One of my aims was to simplify our administration and logistics. I wanted to do away with separate administrations and wasteful independent logistic chains. I reckoned that half our combined budget could have been saved by combining services and facilities. But the CIA people wouldn't hear of it. Lehmann said that I was making waves. I think, if the crisis hadn't come, he probably would have gotten me booted out of Can Tho.

Q: What was the situation? Obviously, there was a change.

MCNAMARA: The situation in the country was deteriorating rapidly.

Q: You're talking about Christmas of '74, of course.

MCNAMARA: Seventy-four, yes. It was around that time, maybe just after. The North Vietnamese mounted an offensive against one of the provinces near the Cambodian border, in III Corps. They laid siege to the province capital. The South Vietnamese tried to reinforce, but were unable to do so.

Q: Around Pleiku, wasn't it?

MCNAMARA: No, it wasn't that far up. It was in III Corps. Pleiku was in II Corps. It was a minor province; I don't remember the name now. The South Vietnamese really tried to hold it, but couldn't. Finally, the province town fell. And that was the first province town to fall.

I remember coming into the Vietnamese corps headquarters' briefing room that morning. The Vietnamese senior staff officers were obviously very agitated about something. They were whispering to one another. I walked in with the corps commander. The sense of gloom was pervasive. Many of them sensed that this defeat was the beginning of the end.

The North Vietnamese were testing for an American reaction. When we didn't react to their attack on a provincial capital, prohibited under the cease fire, then they figured they could go ahead with their more important offensive plans. This attack was a precursor of the more general attacks that began with Kontum and ended in the fall of Saigon.

Q: How was this playing, as you were seeing it? I take it, the area you were in, IV Corps, was relatively quiet, wasn't it?

MCNAMARA: Well, there was fighting going on, especially around the periphery of IV Corps. Within some provinces, there was also minor skirmishing.

When I arrived in Can Tho, I was struck by two things. The first was the sorry physical state of the consulate general buildings in Can Tho. The second was the deterioration in the state of security in much of IV Corps. When I arrived, they had a hot dog stand in the lobby of the consulate general. My first weekend, I told the admin officer to remove it immediately. I then got him to redecorate the lobby and put a new coat of paint on the exterior of the old buildings. The appearance of the consulate general was symptomatic of a general decline in standards.

I began my tour by insisting on cleaning up our physical facilities. I extended my efforts to an insistence on raising standards of work performance. I tried to infuse energy into a lethargic organization. The division in command and the problems with the CIA were my next target.

On the Vietnamese side, two things happened.

After the Tet Offensive, the VC infrastructure had surfaced, been identified, and then killed, captured or forced to leave the populated parts of Vietnam by the much maligned Phoenix Program. A tough Corps commander, General Truong, who vigorously pursued the VC completed the task of putting the VC on the defensive. Cleaning the sanctuaries in Cambodia was another important element in pacifying the delta. Most of the supplies for the Viet Cong in the delta came through Cambodia. Once the supply lines were cut by the invasion into Cambodia, those supplies dried up for a while. And that had an effect on the war in the delta.

Another factor that was very important, which most people didn't recognize, was that the policies that we'd carried on in terms of economic development were really coming to fruition at about that time. We'd introduced miracle rice varieties from the Philippines. We'd redistributed land to the peasants after paying off the large landholders. We'd set up rural banks to provide ready credit to farmers and get them out of the clutches of the Chinese moneylenders. The success of our rural development program resulted in prosperity in the Mekong delta. When I returned after some four years, the farmers were prospering. They were growing three and four crops a year, where they had maybe two before. Each crop was much more abundant - two, three, four times as abundant as any crop had been before. So they were producing lots and lots of rice. The USAID agriculture people calculated that, in 1975, for the first time in ten or 12 years, Vietnam was going to be exporting rice. Up to that point, we'd been supplying a lot of rice to Vietnam. Under our PL 480 program, American rice was coming in and feeding the Vietnamese. Now, they were beginning again to produce a surplus. Our efforts had succeeded in bringing about a green revolution.

As a result of this rural prosperity, the issues that had fed the rebellion by the Viet Cong in the delta had disappeared. The old peasant farmer didn't want his sons to go out and go to war. He wanted to keep them back on the farm to help him grow and market his rice. He had good economic reasons for not getting involved in the war. So recruitment dried up for the Viet Cong. It also was much more difficult, of course, for the national army to recruit. They had to go out and drag draftees into the army. The peasant boys didn't want to go into the army, but they also didn't want to go with the Viet Cong. By the time I got there, I discovered that there were almost no locally recruited Viet Cong. The bulk of their forces in the south in the Mekong delta, were from the north. They were northerners who were doing the fighting, even as guerrillas, in the south. Actually, there was precious little guerrilla activity going on. It was almost all main force northern units.

Q: Obviously, that far south, with northerners down there, there wasn't much rapport. These were fish in unfriendly waters.

MCNAMARA: Yes. There were some, obviously, or the thing couldn't have gone on. But the real black-pajamaed local Viet Cong people were almost a thing of the past. If the northerners had gone away, the rebellion would have ended in a fairly short time in the south. The southerners could have dealt with it easily with their own means. But the northerners were the ones who kept it going.

Well, that was the situation.

When I arrived, there was a corps commander there, a guy named Nghi, who was an absolute wizard on briefings. He was a spellbinder. He had perfected the American Army briefing techniques. He could blind you with charts, statistics and all kinds of bullshit. A great deal of it was absolutely false. I saw American congressmen roll over when that guy got up with his charts. He was marvelous. He was a perfect product of the McNamara era. A perfect product.

The trouble is that he was also President Nguyen Van Thieu's bagman. He was Thieu's instrument for skimming the wealth off the countryside. The Mekong delta, being the richest part of the country, was one of Thieu's most important sources of revenue. The Americans had left. The money that the Vietnamese had been able to extract from our large expenditures was fast drying up. Money to feed the patronage machine had to be squeezed out of the people. A web of corruption was in place. It went from the palace in Saigon down to the corps commanders to the province chiefs to the district chiefs down to the lowest levels, the village chiefs and the hamlet chiefs. In the delta Nghi was the principal bagman. As corps commander, he was at the center of the web in the Mekong delta.

As I visited the various provinces, I found that some of the province chiefs were lying about their reports on the level of security in their provinces. They were saying that there were no problems in places where obviously there were grave security problems. The North Vietnamese were re-infiltrating into areas that had been cleaned out. The situation was deteriorating because they weren't doing anything about it. These guys were interested in making money and were neglecting the security side.

In Vinh-long, the province that I had served in when I first came to Vietnam, my old friends told how the situation was deteriorating while the province chief ignored reality. Our representative there, Bob Traister, was an old CORDS type who had been in Vietnam for at least ten years and spoke colloquial Vietnamese. He had good contacts and understood what was going on. He was the representative also for the neighboring province of Vinh-Binh. He confirmed the grim picture painted by my Vietnamese friends.

The corps commander paid no attention to my warnings. There was no way that he was going to bother the province chief in Vinh-long because the province chief in Vinh-long was supplying him with regular cash payments. Nghi was not about to disturb the proverbial hen that was producing his golden eggs.

Q: Just to get a feel for how this worked on the American side, here you were, you were on the ground, you were the consul general, you understood about this corps commander, but he was your principal point of contact.

MCNAMARA: No. He was my counterpart. We were at the same level. He was in charge of the whole Mekong delta as both military commander and as civil administrator.

Q: You had to have good relations with him. But at the same time, American congressmen, American generals, other people were coming and being briefed by this guy. Did you take them aside afterwards and say, "This guy is like the Wizard of Oz. Don't pay any attention to him. This is what's really happening."?

MCNAMARA: Yes.

Q: Because at a certain point, this was obviously going to get back to him. How did you play this?

MCNAMARA: Well, I played it straight. I did try to correct impressions that he left with them. As far as I can remember, at that point, there hadn't been any American generals down there, but there were important visitors. I tried to play it as straight with them as I could. Congressman Leo Ryan, from California, who was later killed at Jonestown, Guyana, came down. I remember taking him out and watching a firefight from across the river near Chau-doc. I tried to correct impressions that this guy was leaving.

At this point, mainly in Saigon, but elsewhere in Vietnam, too, there was an anti-corruption movement going on. A Catholic priest was leading the movement. This was putting a lot of pressure on Thieu. It was being played up big in the American press. As a result of the American press focus, Thieu could not use the police freely against these people. Demonstrations were being organized. In other times, Thieu would have unleashed the police who would have broken some heads, and ended the demonstrations. He couldn't do this because of the delicacy of his relationship with the United States. He desperately needed an appropriation from Congress for economic and military support. Finally, Thieu had to deal with the demonstrators by getting rid of some corrupt officials.

Under great pressure, he removed the IV corps commander and appointed General Nguyen Qua Nam, commander of the 7th Division to replace him. Nam was a real soldier. He was also incorruptible. An oddity among senior Vietnamese officers, Nam was a bachelor. This was important for wives were one of the principal conduits of corruption in Vietnam. I asked him why he remained a bachelor, and he said, "When the war is over, I will marry. Until that time, I'm going to remain a bachelor. It helps to keep me honest."

Things in the delta quickly changed for the better.

Q: About when was this?

MCNAMARA: It was just before Christmastime. In other words, I wasn't there for very long with this Nghi fellow. Wolfgang Lehmann, in Saigon, when I tried to tell him that Nghi was corrupt and really doing a great deal of harm to the war effort, told me he was the best soldier he'd ever met. Nghi was no soldier at all; he was an accountant, a Mafia accountant.

But Nguyen Qua Nam was a real soldier. He came in, a very quiet man, but a lot of steel in him. He asked me what I thought was going on, and I told him honestly that I thought that he was faced with two things, and they were interconnected: one, was a web of corruption. The second was a deteriorating security situation. The second, I suggested, feeds on the first. Corruption kept in place and distracted inefficient military people who wouldn't prosecute the war because they were so busy extracting money.

"I agree with you completely," he said. "Can you get me some information?" I told him that I would start in Vinh-long, the province that I knew most about. Fortuitously, it is a key province in the Mekong delta, located astride some of the region's most important lines of communication, running northwards to Saigon. "Give your information only to me," he instructed. "I will keep it in my own safe. I cannot rely on my staff for such delicate information," Nam confided. "I want to know about the province chief. I want to know what's going on. I want a good assessment on both corruption and the security situation, and a good evaluation of the province chief and of all the district chiefs. I want you to tell me whether you think they ought to go or stay."

I got my representative in Vinh-long, Bob Traister, to undertake studies on both Vinh-long and Vinh-binh provinces on the most confidential basis. Our report recommended the immediate dismissal of the province chief. We told Nam which district chiefs were worth saving and which ones ought to go. He reacted immediately by canning the province chief. A regimental commander from his former division was named to replace him. I had a few reservations about the regimental commander. Nam told me not to worry. He is a good soldier. That's what he's going to be focused on, fighting the war, not on civil administration. We'll have an honest civil administrator deal with the civil side. The real sources of corruption are there.

We did the same thing in Vinh-binh. There, he said, "Okay, I don't have anybody to replace the province chief. In any case, he is recuperable. I'll leave him there on trial for a short time. But he's on trial and he knows it. If things don't improve, he goes, too." The district chiefs and some of the other officials that we had indicated were sent packing.

To deal with the security situation, Nam established a special zone right in the heart of the delta. He took a colonel whom I had known in I Corps, a young paratrooper, and made him the zone commander. Regular battalions were assigned on a rotating basis to the zone from the ARVN divisions. Under the aggressive command of my paratrooper friend things started turning around in this key area in the heart of the delta.

Nam then went after the division commanders. His replacement in the 7th and the division commander in the 9th Division both were good soldiers. The 9th and the 7th were both performing well. They were in the northern part of the delta. The 7th was protecting the main route up to Saigon, Route 4, and the 9th was operating in the Parrot's Beak, which is a long strip of Cambodia that juts into Vietnam. It is a historic route of infiltration and invasion. He just prodded those divisions, because they were in good hands and were operating well already. The 21st Division, in the south, had a weak commander. As a result, the division was not performing well. Nam replaced this gentleman with a more aggressive officer. At the same time, he warned the other province chiefs that they must perform or be replaced. He also put out word that he would not expect the usual monthly payoffs. One province chief confided to Willie Saulter, my representative in a province along the "Parrot's Beak" that he was greatly relieved at not having to extract money from the local merchants.

Q: Let me ask a question going back to the initial discussion about the CIA. Basically, the CIA operation is a corrupting one: you're paying people of a government to supply you with information at the same time you're trying to wipe out corruption. How was this working out? When you tell your CIA man, "Look, we want to find out who's corrupt," obviously they're not going to tell you they're corrupt people.

MCNAMARA: That's right. Stu, I had better sources of information than they did. I did not involve them in any of these studies. In any case, I was never sure how I could trust them. They might well have told some of their friends about what we were doing. Since some of their sources were probably among the targets of our investigation, the whole effort could have been endangered.

Q: I'm sure you did.

MCNAMARA: Through people that I knew myself, because I'd served in the delta. I also knew a lot of people in the Vietnamese army with whom I'd served elsewhere. Also, I had my network of USAID guys from CORDS who were well experienced and well plugged in to very good sources of local information. So we had good information, and paid nothing for it. Moreover, we were capable of evaluating our information in a more sophisticated, knowledgeable way than was the CIA. In short, I got no information on corruption from the CIA. God knows what they were doing, because I didn't see all their output, but most of what I did was on the military intentions of the Viet Cong. Unfortunately, most of it was wrong. Of the rest, a large part came from their sources in the South Vietnamese army and police. We were getting almost identical material directly from the army and police as part of our regular liaison. Another significant source, I believe, was disinformation being fed to them by the Viet Cong to mislead us.

Q: Well, did you tell them to cut out paying Vietnamese officials, that you were trying to root out corruption?

MCNAMARA: I brought up the contradiction you mentioned, that we're against corruption, but yet we're corrupting people ourselves, to DCM Lehmann, station chief Polgar and the regional CIA boss. I had no success in convincing any of them that we were defeating our own interests. One of the biggest problems was that Martin wanted several independent sources of information. He deluded himself in thinking that he had such a source in the CIA hacks that were then operating in my part of Vietnam. Lehmann loyally carried out his instructions despite contradictions.

Q: Like trying to convert the Pope to another religion. That's the mother's milk of espionage.

MCNAMARA: That's right. Good lord, they're...

Q: Rolling in money.

MCNAMARA: They did not understand or did not wish to understand. It all went over their heads. I tried to get them to do things which should have been acceptable to them.

Q: Then how did the situation during the winter and early spring, until April, play out, as far as you saw it?

MCNAMARA: In the delta?

Q: Yes.

MCNAMARA: In the delta, things, right up to the end, were going fairly well. Obviously, the problems elsewhere in the country were having an effect in the delta on morale. The war itself, however, was not going badly in the delta. NVA units periodically attempted to cut Route 4, but the 7th Division stopped them. Infiltration into the heartland of the delta was slowed, and Nam's effort to recover lost ground in Vinh-long and Vinh-binh had made a good start. The South Vietnamese could have held out in the delta for a long time, maybe indefinitely, if they had shifted their forces around Saigon southwards into the delta. Of course, this would have meant giving up Saigon. The North Vietnamese could not have used tanks in the soggy rice paddies of the delta. The southerners would have had the psychological advantage of fighting for their home. To accept the loss of Saigon, however, was probably too much for them to contemplate. I am not sure whether they ever really seriously considered a retreat into the delta. General Truong did come down to study the possibility just before the end. At that time, however, he was badly shaken by his losses in I corps, and may not have been capable of coming to grips with such a drastic strategy and of convincing others of its feasibility.

Q: It's marshy, with rivers.

MCNAMARA: It's marshy. You couldn't use armor down there. The South Vietnamese were doing pretty well in the delta, right up to the end. The problems were elsewhere in the country.

Q: What were you getting from the embassy, as the situation was falling apart?

MCNAMARA: Well, we got some reporting from the embassy on what was going on elsewhere in the country. I gathered most of my information on quick trips to Saigon where I could talk to friends like Jake Jacobson. The situation in Saigon was very tense, very nervous and panicky. Many Americans were panicking in Saigon, and very nervous.

When Danang was overrun and Nha-Trang evacuated, I told the embassy that, "I don't want any of the people from up north, who have been evacuated or who've evacuated themselves, coming down to the delta. I saw what a state many of them were in. Panic is infectious. These people could not teach us much about evacuation and might only succeed in frightening some of my own weaker subordinates."

I was able to keep everybody out except the CIA people. Some of them came down and did panic members of the CIA contingent in the delta. They scared the shit out of them by telling them what had happened up north and how this was inevitably going to be repeated in the delta. In mid-April, the CIA people began to predict a Viet Cong offensive against Can Tho. One of their number, with fear in his voice, told me that the Viet Cong would come pouring into Can Tho. They would "breach the town defenses in half an hour." This was sheer fantasy. It was crap that they were being fed by the Viet Cong. I'm convinced that the Viet Cong were feeding them disinformation. It was meant to spread panic and to tie down the intact army division from deploying northwards to defend Saigon. Unfortunately, my CIA colleagues were also passing the unevaluated intelligence to Saigon and to Washington, breeding further unease.

I was trying to calm things, saying, "We don't have that kind of a situation down here. Basically, the military situation here is stable. The problem is morale. The VC are creating incidents down here. What they're trying to do is to tie down the three regular divisions in the delta so that these divisions couldn't be redeployed to the defense of Saigon." General Nam agreed calmly with my assessment.

One night the VC captured some artillery pieces in Vinh-long and bombarded Can Tho. They started fires that quickly spread engulfing a section of the city near our consulate general. We were almost burned out.

There were such problems, but we weren't in danger of being overrun. I couldn't convince the CIA of this.

General Fred Weyand visited us in April as part of a mission to evaluate the situation for the President.

Q: He was Army Chief of Staff at one point.

MCNAMARA: Well, he was the Chief of Staff then. He had been in Vietnam, of course, and by this time he was a four-star general. I remember having him to lunch, and I asked him how things were going? "Very badly," he replied. He described how Thieu showed him letters written by Nixon, guaranteeing that, if Thieu would sign the cease fire agreement in '72, the U.S. would come to South Vietnam's assistance should the North mount a threatening invasion. The existence of these letters has since been in the press. At the time, their existence was not widely known. In fact, Weyand himself was not aware of the letters' existence until he was shown them by Thieu who called on us to honor our former President's promise. Needless to say, Weyand was disturbed.

As things began to deteriorate elsewhere in the country, I started thinking about evacuation and how to make sure that none of my guys in the sixteen offices all over the delta got left behind. First, I had to think through what kind of an evacuation would best meet our needs under several scenarios. We had an evacuation plan, which was worthless. It called for our closing the consulate general and driving to Saigon. That would only work under the most ideal circumstances-a luxury we were unlikely to have. Then I looked at evacuation by helicopters, because that's what they were talking about in Saigon. When I considered our numbers I began to realize this would require a major commitment of helicopters, as well as troops to secure LZs. It was just mind-boggling. Finally, I looked at the feasibility of a water borne evacuation down the Bassac River to the sea.

At the same time, I decided that I'd better start closing my outlying offices and bring people to Can Tho or send them to Saigon for evacuation. I had to bring our number down, but at the same time, I wanted to avoid panicking the Vietnamese who were already very nervous. I had to avoid precipitous action that could prematurely collapse the fragile Vietnamese structure while moving fast enough to assure the safety of my personnel. If we caused a panic, as happened in Nha Trang, all of us might be trapped. This was a very delicate operation.

I then began to consider who I would attempt to evacuate, if it were necessary. I took stock. There were about a hundred Americans almost equally divided between CIA and all of the other agencies represented at the CG. Most of the non-CIA types were field reps left over from CORDS. By and large, they were as solid as rocks. I also had three or four young FSOs, one of whom was a consular officer, the others did political reporting. Then there was a potpourri of other technicians, people who searched for MIAs (missing in action). I was determined that I was going to do what I could for our Vietnamese employees. I felt strongly that we had a special responsibility towards them and their families.

I could now see that only the water option was likely to allow evacuation of large numbers of Vietnamese. I started to look at it more closely and saw that even limiting evacuation to immediate families, we would have 3000-4000 people. That is an awful lot of people. I thought how can I deal with all these people? There's no way that I would have the means to get them all out. Clearly, only the water option was likely to give me the necessary capacity. But even then, I could not handle such large numbers.

I then began seriously to consider how we would reduce our number to a manageable level. After several sleepless nights, I came up with a scheme for setting priority categories for our employees. First priority was given those likely to be in mortal danger if taken by the VC. These might include CIA interrogators, etc. Second, would be people who could easily survive in a modern society, like the U.S. or France. These would include most of our well educated staff who had skills, and spoke foreign languages. In the third category, I placed all the other unskilled or semi-skilled employees who spoke only Vietnamese and were not likely to be in grave danger. These would include guards, char-ladies, the GSO force, etc. I then issued instructions to all of my American supervisors that they must place all of their employees in these three categories. Finally, I told them that we would make every effort to get those in the top two categories out with their immediate families, if they wanted to go. Those in the last category, we would only evacuate if we had the available capacity. Clearly, this was a soul scaring experience for many forced to play God in making what might mean life or death decisions.

Events were now moving rapidly. Offices were being closed and people sent to Saigon or brought to Can Tho. We were reducing numbers of Americans and Vietnamese. Both the agricultural technicians and the MIA searchers were ordered to Saigon. I sent some on regular Air America flights while others were going by road to Saigon for evacuation from Tan San Nhut airport. Both Vietnamese and Americans, and they were supposed to be fed into the regular evacuation in Saigon. That was part of my plan. For the final evacuation, if it came to that, I figured we'd have to go down the river, unless we could get virtually everybody for whom we were responsible out beforehand.

I talked about this with people in Saigon. Jake Jacobson was absolutely against my going down river. He said, "It's too dangerous to go down the river. You've got to go out by air, and you will only be able to take the Americans, because you won't have enough helicopters." We had, at this point, three or four Air America helicopters working in the delta with a passenger capacity of some 30 people.

I said, "No, I won't go for that." I reckoned that I would still have between 300-400 Vietnamese plus some 30-40 Americans to evacuate.

And he said, "Well, that's the way it's going to be. If you don't like it, go see the ambassador."

So I went to see Martin and told him that I was very upset. I was being told that I would not be able to evacuate my Vietnamese employees. I explained that a water borne evacuation was the only feasible means of dealing with the number I had in mind. I told him that I had considered the possible dangers, but had concluded that the risk was acceptable under the circumstances.

He said, "Well, of course, you can take the Vietnamese. Of course, you can. It's part of our plan. Of course, you can do it." He was very agitated. He went in and grabbed Wolfgang Lehmann and hollered at him, and said, "What's this, Terry is being told he can't take his Vietnamese."

And Wolfgang looked frightened. "Of course he can take his Vietnamese employees," he stammered.

Martin said to Wolfgang, "You make sure that it's understood that he can do this, that he can take his Vietnamese out."

I then went back to Jake and told Jake what had happened. He looked me directly in the eyes saying, "That's all very well, what he's saying right now, but when the time comes and you have to get out of there, and the pressures are on and the time is short, don't be surprised if you get an order saying that you have to go by helicopter, and you won't be able to take the Vietnamese."

The CIA people were absolutely against this going out by water, as were some of the others. The admin officer, a retired army colonel, was also absolutely against it. Some were just not as committed to the Vietnamese as those of us who had spent years in Vietnam and who had gotten to know Vietnamese as people and not just as paid informants. Moreover, many were frightened. They believed their own intelligence reports that we might be overrun any minute. They considered going down the river just short of suicidal. That's the way their attitudes were described to me.

Q: How far up the river were you?

MCNAMARA: Seventy miles. It wasn't suicidal, nor was it without risk. For years Americans in Vietnam had focused on movement by air. They almost forgot about travel by surface. None of those who condemned evacuation by water were sailors. None of them ever asked themselves how one might block a river? It would be very difficult to block traffic on a river as wide as the Mekong. Of course there are some narrow spots. Before deciding on the water borne option I flew over the river myself from Can Tho to the sea. Certainly there are some dangerous narrow places with islands constricting the broad flow of the river. Nonetheless, traffic could only be stopped by armed boats in the river. The VC, of course, had no navy. They could, however, make passage dangerous and uncomfortable by firing at passing boats from the shoreline. The fact that regular traffic on the river had never been seriously disturbed would tend to indicate that our boats had a very good chance of traveling down river without being harmed. Moreover, we had the element of surprise working for us. No one, including the VC, would have expected the Americans to leave by boat. I counted heavily on this factor of surprise in my calculations.

Q: And it wasn't as though the whole place was filled with people in black pajamas, all heavily armed, waiting to rise up at any moment.

MCNAMARA: No, that was not the case. However, about halfway down the river from Can Tho to the sea there was a known VC infiltration route that crossed the river using a series of islands as easy stepping stones and as shelter from the Vietnamese navy. The VC forces were known to be in the area. I had no success in convincing our CIA colleagues of the feasibility of evacuation by water. Moreover, they were becoming increasingly frightened.

Early on, I made a mistake at one of my staff meetings. At that point things were not yet clear. The end appeared to be near, but one could not yet be certain when or how it would come about. I was struggling with the problem of honoring what I saw as a commitment to those Vietnamese who had allied themselves with us. Unfortunately, I expressed some of my musing aloud. Perhaps I inadvertently contributed to their fright. Speculating about what the CG's role might be if the regime collapsed, I posed the possibility that a few of us might remain behind as witnesses to deter the VC from the sort of mass executions that took place in Cambodia. It would certainly be risky and we would probably be taken prisoner. But the VC would probably not want to kill us. American prisoners had proven too useful to them in the past. Moreover, our status as diplomats might provide some measure of protection, but probably not much.

I should never have said anything like that even in a closed staff meeting. I reckon that I scared the shit out of many of my colleagues. Under such circumstances one had to consider all possibilities. Nonetheless, I should have kept this one to myself.

Getting back to my evacuation planning. I'd bought a rice barge, with some of our counterpart funds. A friend working for USAID logistics in Saigon heard about my evacuation plan. His name was Cliff Frink. His lady friend had worked at the CG before transferring to Saigon. As a result, he knew most of the Americans in Can Tho. When he heard that I needed boats he offered two LCMs, lightly armored landing barges, with Vietnamese crews. They had been prepared to carry supplies by river to Phnom Penh. Slabs of concrete had been added to their engine compartments. Elsewhere, the sides and coxswain's port were protected with ½ inch armor plates adequate to deflect small arms fire. I was delighted. The boats were perfect for my purpose. When they arrived from Saigon I cached them at different places on the riverbank-one at the Shell Oil dock, and the other at a USAID compound that we had further down the river. I did not want them together for fear of losing both at the same time. We filled them with fuel, and docked them ready for use on short notice.

Earlier, I bought a rice barge to use for the evacuation. However, the LCM's were much more capable. They were sea worthy, had strong engines, could handle relatively large numbers and were armored. Moreover, they came complete with trained crews. I now was confident that the trip down the river and out to sea was feasible at an acceptable level of risk. Furthermore, the boats were large enough to accommodate several hundred people.

At one of the evacuation meetings in Saigon I arranged with the Navy, and Marine representative, for a ship to meet us off the mouth of the river. The evacuation fleet representatives assured me that there would be no problem in picking us up just off shore. They would use a shallow draft LST that could get very close to shore. All we had to do, they said, was get to the river mouth.

In the event the Navy wasn't there-but that's later on in the story.

Q: Well, why don't we stop at this point, and we'll pick it up about how the final days played out.

Today is June 9, 1993, and we're continuing with Terry McNamara. Terry, every once in a while would you put in a date or two, or give somewhat of the context. How did plans develop?

MCNAMARA: I have now given the form of things as they were in mid-April. We started to seriously consider an evacuation in the end of March, or the beginning of April. As Danang and Nha-Trang fell, we had had to make preparation in case the whole country collapsed and we had to leave quickly.

There was, I suppose, always a possibility that somehow or other they'd be able to stop the North Vietnamese from taking Saigon itself. There was also the possibility that they might make a stand in the Mekong delta. It was defensible and was still firmly in South Vietnamese hands. To fight in the delta, the North Vietnamese lines of communication would be very extended. Moreover, they could not use their armor in the marshy delta. Thus, the final outcome did not appear predestined early in April.

As you may recall, there was a very gallant defensive blocking action by the South Vietnamese 25th Division, north of Saigon, which lasted for at least a week, maybe two weeks. They stopped the rapid progress of the North Vietnamese down the coast. This time, that was bought so dearly, could have been used to organize Saigon's defenses and/or shift forces to the delta.

As time went on, it became increasingly obvious that a total collapse would occur. Preparations for evacuation began in earnest in the second week of April. I began to filter people up to Saigon, gradually closing offices. This was a very delicate operation. If we did it too quickly or too publicly, we ran the risk of panicking the South Vietnamese and possibly collapsing their defenses and administration, as happened in 2 Corps and around Danang. That was a big risk. Also, we could have had a reaction against us by the South Vietnamese themselves.

Q: If we're going down, you're going down with us.

MCNAMARA: That's right. You guys got us into this now you are not going to leave us to face the consequences alone.

Q: What was the feeling about how we pulled out of Danang and other places like that? Were you getting any stories of lessons learned?

MCNAMARA: When I went to Saigon I heard various accounts of the chaos that took hold in the last days in Danang. The whole structure collapsed so suddenly. No one was prepared. I decided that there was little constructive to be learned from that dreadful experience. We had more time to plan and prepare ourselves for an orderly departure.

The one thing that I wanted most to avoid was panic. You had to try to hold people together, reassure them that they were going to get out, and maintain some kind of discipline. To avoid the spread of panic, I was very much against people who had been involved in the evacuation elsewhere coming to the delta.

Q: You didn't want them to infect the people.

MCNAMARA: I didn't want them to infect the people in the delta with...

Q: Defeatism.

MCNAMARA: Defeatism and panic. There's nothing like fear. It's much more infectious than any disease that you can think of. I'd seen this when I'd evacuated people from Katanga, how dangerous the spread of fear could be.

So I decided that I was going to get as many people out, quietly, to Saigon as I could, as quickly as I could, but with all due prudence in terms of staging them out and closing my offices around the delta.

As I closed the one in My-tho, for instance, I took the guys who were there and I sent them up to Saigon. They and Willie Saulters, who was my representative in an isolated little province south of the Parrot's Beak, were instructed to set themselves up in Saigon to help our Vietnamese employees and their families as I sent them up from the delta. They were to assist them in getting through the confusion to Tan Son Nhut. At the same time I went ahead with my planning for a final waterborne evacuation.

On one of my visits to the embassy in Saigon I met the former Consul General in Danang, Al Francis. I had heard stories that he had conducted himself very well indeed during the evacuation. Courageously, he fought to evacuate as many civilians as possible. I understand that he was saved by my former body guard, Bucky, from almost certain death at the hands of some frightened Vietnamese marines. When I saw him, he was frustrated and very disturbed. I remember hearing him screaming in the halls of the embassy. I thought, "That is just what I don't need in Can Tho." Shortly afterwards, Al came to me asking whether he couldn't come down and advise us on some of the lessons that he had learned from his evacuation.

Q: This was a test in diplomacy for you.

MCNAMARA: Yes! Because I respected Al. He had done a herculean job in Danang. I certainly didn't want to offend him. Nevertheless, I also didn't feel that I needed him in the delta.

It was just the sort of thing that I didn't want in the delta. I wanted to keep people as calm as possible, and to keep some control over, as you put it, defeatism. Obviously, the South Vietnamese were being defeated, but, damn it, there were still ways of maintaining our honor and our sang-froid. We weren't going to get out of there if we panicked, and we certainly weren't going to maximize the chances of getting out the Vietnamese to whom I felt a moral responsibility.

I also had a responsibility to my counterpart, General Nam, not to panic and not to cause more general panic among his troops and the population. The situation was so fragile. We could have easily had the same panicky collapse of order and discipline in Can Tho as had happened in Danang and Nha-Trang. The Vietnamese were watching me and the other Americans very closely. We could easily have precipitated riots if we had shown by ill considered acts that we were about to leave. It was a very delicate balance that had to be maintained.

In Nha-Trang, I understand, they called in helicopters to evacuate the consulate general. The North Vietnamese did not arrive in Nha-Trang until a week or so after the American consulate general evacuated in great disarray. In the melee around the evacuation helicopters the Americans lost many of the people they most wanted to get on those helicopters. By bringing the helicopters in prematurely, they caused a riot with people fighting to get places on helicopters. Sadly, some of our own most valued employees were shoved out of the way by crowds of people trying to get on the helicopters. They never got out. Perhaps I am misjudging the situation in Nha-Trang. I wouldn't want my opinion of what went on in Nha-Trang to be taken as authoritative. I wasn't there. Nonetheless, that was my perception of what went on at the time. I wanted to prevent it from happening in Can Tho.

Against my instructions, the CIA chief brought people in who had been in the northern evacuations. As I anticipated, they spread fear and defeatism amongst their already receptive colleagues. I made only one exception. I did allow Mack Prosser, the former provincial representative in Da Lat, to join us in Can Tho. His wife was one of the Ambassador's secretaries in Saigon. Jake Jacobson asked me, as a personal favor, if I would take Mack down in the delta. I did, and he was perfectly okay. He was an old hand, a former Army officer who'd come into CORDS and had been around for a long time. He was not traumatized. He had not gone through the dreadful experiences in Nha-Trang. In fact, he was very useful later on when he kept notes of some of the easily forgotten details of our evacuation.

In our final briefing on the evacuation, Cary Kassebaum accompanied me to Saigon. We fixed a rendezvous at the mouth of the river with the Navy/Marines. They promised that a ship would be there. I took that promise seriously. It was also made perfectly clear to us by the evacuation fleet representative that there would be no fleet of helicopters for evacuation from Can Tho. We were on our own, as I had expected we would be. Providentially, I had made the right assumption early enough to allow me to prepare for an evacuation using only our own means. Otherwise, I never would have been able to evacuate any of the Vietnamese employees who had stayed with us to the end in Can Tho.

At that time, when I was in Saigon, the embassy itself was in chaos. The city itself was quiet, but you could see the apprehension in the faces of all of the Vietnamese. They didn't know what to expect. They were expecting the worst, but they didn't know quite what might happen. I didn't go out to see the evacuation points at Tan Son Nhut, but I was told that it was a madhouse.

I went around to some of the safe houses where some of my people from Danang were being held in preparation for the trip to the airport and a flight to safety. I wanted to say goodbye to them and wish them well.

While in town, I went to a French restaurant that I often frequented, La Cave. Before, when I'd gone there, the food was good, and the service was excellent. This time, I took Kassebaum with me. They had curfew on, so we had to go late in the afternoon to have dinner. The old Frenchman who ran the place, a Corsican who knew me, was very sad. He apologized for the poor service. He said he only could give us a fixed menu, very simple fare. We ate a last supper in Saigon, which wasn't too bad. My Corsican friend gave us a particularly good bottle of wine that he said was being saved for a special occasion.

We had taken the assistant cashier with us to the embassy. She carried back a large stock of American dollars and lots of Vietnamese piasters. These were to be used to pay off our employees. They might also have come in handy, if we needed to pay for cooperation in our evacuation. My admin officer, a retired Army colonel named Averill Christian, who worked for USAID, had sent her up. He wanted to have the cash on hand, so that if we needed to bribe somebody, we'd have the money. We also wanted to be able to pay off all our employees before we left-the ones who were going to stay behind, in piasters; the ones who were coming with us, we wanted to be able to pay off in dollars, so that they'd have some money when they got out. We were taking care of all eventualities.

No one could yet be positive that there would be an evacuation. In my own mind, I was ninety-five percent sure that it would come. There was always the possibility that somehow or other they'd hold on in the Mekong delta and we wouldn't have to leave. I was told in the embassy, that some negotiations between the GVN and the VC were going on. Obviously, these weren't as serious as I was given to believe at the time.

I returned to the delta to continue preparations for an evacuation. At the same time, I maintained the flow of people going to Saigon progressively thinning our ranks.

Early one morning, I got a call from Jacobson. This was maybe three or four days before the final evacuation on April 29. He asked me if I had ordered helicopters for an evacuation from Saigon? I told him that I had not.

He said, "Well, somebody from Can Tho has ordered a large number of Air America helicopters to come to Can Tho for an evacuation. I assured Jake that I had given no such order, nor did I have any knowledge of such an order having been given by anyone else in Can Tho.

"What about your CIA people?" Jake asked. "What do you think of such a mission?"

"It would be a very bad idea," I responded. "We are not ready to evacuate all our people yet. I still have teams in one or two of the provinces. Even in Can Tho our people are not prepared for a sudden evacuation. Our preparations have not gotten to that point, nor would the local security situation warrant immediate evacuation. Moreover, the sudden arrival of helicopters for an evacuation of Americans could elicit panic and chaos among the general population and the Vietnamese army. We could cause another situation like in Nha-Trang. Under those circumstances, many of us might not get out, especially if everyone were not taken out in the first load. Those waiting for a second or third load would have a hell of a lot of trouble. This is just the sort of thing that happened elsewhere, and we don't want it to happen here. It's not necessary. It would be very bad, and it could prematurely collapse the whole South Vietnamese structure in the region-something we did not want to happen. I am convinced that it would be a bad thing."

"I will ground all of the Air America helicopters here, and you take the same action in Can Tho, until we find out who gave that order."

Obviously, it was the spooks. There wasn't anybody else who could have done it.

So I gave the order immediately that all of the helicopters were grounded in IV Corps.

Then I called in the chief spook to my office. Initially he denied any knowledge for involvement in the order to bring helicopters to Can Tho for an evacuation. A little while later, he came back to my office. This time he admitted that he had given the order to send the helicopters. I got very angry. He had initiated a monstrously dangerous course of action without any consultation, or even warning to others whose safety he might have endangered. He admitted that the CIA people and their agents would be the focus of his evacuation. The other Americans, as far as I could see, and certainly all of the Vietnamese for whom I felt responsible, were going to be left behind. Presumably, I would not have known anything about their operation until after they had departed. I hit the roof. This was the ultimate in duplicity and irresponsibility.

I told him that all helicopters were grounded-they were grounded in Saigon, they were grounded here-and that was that. He asked to use my direct line to Saigon. I refused. I told him that this was the last straw. He would have to leave Can Tho!

As I calmed down I realized that I could not afford to fracture the always shaky unity of the Consulate General at such a critical time. Despite the fact that there had been repeated duplicity and were now guilty of almost criminal irresponsibility, I remained responsible for the safety of the CIA people, as well as all others at the CG. I had to provide strong leadership. Obviously, the CIA chief had already panicked. He could not be counted on to act responsibly.

This was part of the problem of not providing experienced people who knew and could deal with problems in Vietnam. Experience in Laos or elsewhere did not equip people for the kind of trials they faced in Vietnam. The CIA chief was a great tennis player. He was an Irishman with red hair, an athletic build and a hard looking face. He looked tough as nails. But there, at nut-cutting time, when it really came down to a crisis, he lost his nerve, as did many other supposed tough guys in our CIA contingent. Without strong leadership, the organization came apart with everyone looking for his own exit to safety.

Surprisingly, my ex-Peace Corps volunteers, like Cary Kassebaum, who looked like Caspar Milquetoast and had glasses about as thick as the bottoms of Coke bottles did not panic. They and my junior FSO's were rock solid. Moreover, these two groups were among the most insistent on our moral responsibility to take care of those Vietnamese who worked for us. Obviously, we could not take care of all of the Vietnamese in Vietnam, but we could at least try to take care of those who worked directly for us, and their immediate families. We had a clear moral responsibility to do that. Most of the CORDS old-timers like my deputy, Hank Cushing, the ex-Peace Corps volunteer and the young FSO's all shared this view.

Anyway, I felt I had to bury my difference with the CIA chief and work with him to get his people out. I called him again to my office and told him, "Look, I feel that you've done something which is very bad. Under any other circumstances, I wouldn't even talk to you again. But under these circumstances, we both have a responsibility. We both have to get all of our people out. So we must work together."

He indicated that he understood and agreed.

"Okay, how do we best accomplish this joint goal? How did you plan to use the helicopters?"

Answering my question, he told me that there was to be simultaneous landings of Air America helicopters. All CIA personnel would jump aboard and be whisked to a ship at sea. They had gotten the Navy to move a ship down to a position off the Mekong delta.

In fact, Jacobson had found out about this movement of helicopters through an admiral, who asked him, "What about this order I have received from the embassy to move a ship?" Jacobson couldn't figure out where the order came from; it had not come from his office which was responsible for the coordination of all evacuation operations. After checking, he found it had not come from, nor did I approve of it.

I was aghast when I heard what the CIA people had been planning. Nevertheless, I set about modifying their plan to make it less dangerous and more acceptable. I decided that helicopters come in singly, go to designated LZs outside town, pick up people sent to the rendezvous and then take them out to a ship offshore. The helicopters would fly low to avoid detection by the South Vietnamese radar at Ben Thuy airbase near Can Tho. We would use only the three or four helicopters assigned to work in IV Corps.

I instructed the CIA man to get his Vietnamese employees and agents out first. I reckoned that they would be in greatest danger should they be taken by the VC. When his people were all gone, I planned to continue the helicopter operation until all of our employees and their families were safely on the offshore ship. At that point, I would only have to worry about the remaining Americans and a few essential Vietnamese employees. Given these reduced numbers, we could probably all leave in one load on our 3-4 helicopters and not bother with a waterborne evacuation.

The air operation was started as I have outlined. Hank Cushing was given responsibility of monitoring it. I had insisted that Hank, a USAID employee, be named deputy principal officer even though the State Department was dead set against it. The Department wanted an FSO. I reasoned that a joint operation should be jointly staffed. The deputy ought to be from USAID. Moreover, I had known Hank when I was in Danang and he was province senior advisor in Quang Ngai. We were old friends and I had great faith in him. He had the experience needed for the job, and the confidence of both Americans and Vietnamese in the delta. Hank and Averill Christian, the Admin officer, were charged with the detailed management of the evacuation.

In the last days of April, people were being moved out rapidly. Having taken precautions, our unobtrusive operation caused no ripples. The LZs were never used more than once. People were picked up by the side of roads or in fields. The helicopters were going all over the delta for their pickups. The system was working well. If we had more time, we probably would not have needed our boats. But we could not foresee when the final order to evacuate would come.

On the morning of April 29, the chief spook came to me and told me he had almost all of his people out. As planned we would then start on the non-CIA folks. By this time, only eighteen Americans, out of over one hundred, remained in the delta. We had already identified the people for whom we felt responsible. The others had been filtered out through Saigon as provincial offices were closed and non-essential programs curtailed. A number of "high priority" Vietnamese had also been reduced. Many had been sent to Saigon. There, they were having difficulty getting through the processing at Tan Son Nhut, despite the best efforts of the Americans I had sent to serve as expeditors. Others had come to Can Tho to await transportation to Saigon, or a direct evacuation. The problems in Saigon, of course, were beyond my control. I could only hope that our people would be given appropriate priority by those running the processing in Saigon. Later I learned that this was not always the case.

My last provincial office was closed in Vinh-long, by Bob Traister on April 27th or 28th. I told him I wanted him out of there that weekend, the weekend before the 29th. He informed the province chief and the deputy province chief that we were closing our office. His relations were especially close with many of the provincial officials. The deputy province chief, the top civilian official and a fine man, called me on Friday to ask if Traister could stay for a going-away party on Saturday night. His friends felt they were likely never to see one another again. All knew that the end was near. After I had given my permission the deputy told me that he probably would never see me again. He thanked me for my friendship and for the things I had done for the people of Vinh-long. There was no panic in his voice, only dignified resignation. Traister arrived in Can Tho on April 28th. His was the last provincial office to be closed. Our timing could not have been better.

We had Vietnamese army interpreters assigned to our advisory effort. They worked directly for us as part of our operations. Traister brought his whole team with him including the soldier interpreters. They were good soldiers with lots of experience in the field. As soon as they got there, I told Traister to take his gang on board the Mike boats and the rice barge to protect them. Traister himself boarded the LCM docked at the CORDS compound. Thus, we had reliable armed men on the boats; nobody could steal them, nobody could screw around with them. We also had Vietnamese crews on the Mike boats.

Q: A Mike boat being...

MCNAMARA: An LCM (landing craft, mechanized). It's a triangular open decked landing craft, with a door in the bow that lowers to allow vehicles and personnel to exit the boat.

Q: It's sort of a half-sized LST, isn't it?

MCNAMARA: No, it's not half sized, it's much smaller than that. It'll take a good-sized truck or a World War II tank. It's a good-sized boat, but there's nothing indoors. The only cabin is over the engine. The rest of the boat is open, but with high armored sides protecting the cargo deck. The coxswain's post sits on top of the engine compartment in the stern. They are good work boats. They have heavy dual diesel engines, a shallow draft, and are lightly armored. Our Mike boats, however, had been reinforced with "sleeves" of concrete protecting the engine compartment against rocket attack.

Traister was on the boats with instructions to protect them.

On the morning of April 29th, I was in my house, in bed, when I was awakened by several explosions in the town. I jumped out of bed, got on the radio, and called the Marine NCOIC Staff Sergeant. Hasty came on, with his high-pitched pubescent voice. He was tall and skinny, with glasses. He looked about 15 years old. But he was a staff sergeant of Marines, and he was incredibly gungho. When I told him that we were probably going to have to evacuate by water, he said, "Sir, that sounds very dangerous."

I said, "Well, maybe so, but that's what we're going to do."

He drew himself up and seriously declared, "Well, no guts, no glory."

I almost wet my pants. He was marvelous. A caricature of a Marine.

Q: Well, war is the great playground for an awful lot of people.

MCNAMARA: Despite his fantasies, he was very bright. Since our days together, he has become an officer in the Marines. The last time I saw him, about three or four years ago, he had just completed an MA at George Washington University in Middle Eastern studies. Hasty was very reliable but naive and very full of the Corps. Death before dishonor and that sort of thing. The only problem with him was that you had to restrain him, hold onto his coattails so he wouldn't do anything foolish. But beyond that, you didn't have to push him, which was the biggest problem with so many people.

Anyway, I got him on the radio, and he said that some rockets had landed on the Can Tho waterfront. I believe he told me that one of my favorite restaurants was damaged in the attack. (Some Chinese had a hotel down on the waterfront, which you wouldn't have wanted to stay in. I don't think they changed the sheets very often, but they had a good restaurant.) To reassure me, he said that the physical damage was not extensive. I am sure that the purpose of the VC bombardment was more psychological than physical. The city remained calm, however.

Then he came over to my house, in a great squeal of brakes. There was a little terrace off my bedroom on the second floor, and I walked out on that. He was down on the driveway inside my little compound (I had a chain link fence around my house). And we talked; he told me what had happened then in more detail. So I said, "Okay, I'll be down to the office as quickly as I can get up and get dressed." So he went off to inspect whatever other damage there might be, and get his Marines squared away for the day.

We were then resigned to the fall of Saigon and the probable collapse of the regime. Thieu had gone and "Big Minh" had taken over as President. Our fate, and that of Vietnam, would be sealed in the next few days. In the delta, the VC were doing everything they could to give the impression that Can Tho and the rest of the delta were in imminent danger. As I said, they had shelled Can Tho earlier and now they had rocketed the town. Neither had any military significance, but they did send a morale damaging message.

The spooks were getting many reports of preparations for an imminent attack on Can Tho. One version claimed that the North Vietnamese were massing troops just south of Can Tho, in preparation for an attack. They allegedly expected to pour into Can Tho City overwhelming the formidable defenses. As one CIA operator told me, with real fear in his eyes, "They could be in here in a half an hour's time." I was hearing similar reports from other sources and largely discounting them as VC psychological warfare ploys. The corps commander, General Nam, agreed with my analysis. He reckoned that his forces could repel any known force that could then be thrown at the defenses of Can Tho. The North Vietnamese simply did not have the troops in the delta at that time.

Q: This was several days before, because by this time, they'd pretty well left.

MCNAMARA: Their Vietnamese auxiliaries were gone when the helicopters left. There were still some CIA Americans in Can Tho. These reports had been building up. I had been talking to the corps commander, General Nam, and he and I both agreed that this was just a disinformation campaign, and that what they were trying to do was to tie down the South Vietnamese troops in the delta, so that the South Vietnamese would not send troops northwards to the defense of Saigon and to help counter the thrust southward of the North Vietnamese columns coming down from the north. It was the oldest tactic in the world-a diversion.

There was no real indication that there were the numbers of troops that would be required to break through the defenses of a very heavily defended Can Tho, where you had a seasoned, calm commander who was determined to hold the place and who had good troops to do it with. There was no way that, without an awful lot of firepower and an awful lot of enemy troops, they had any chance at all of breaking into that town. And there were no indications, whatsoever, that they had that kind of strength in the delta at that point.

The threat wasn't credible if you analyzed it calmly based on the good enemy order of battle information we had. But, panicky people who had lost their nerve were not able to analyze rationally. That's just what had happened elsewhere in Vietnam. A lot of the collapse of the Vietnamese in the north had come about because of panic and loss of nerve. Their flight from the highlands and from I Corps was not because they had lost great battles. They hadn't. They had lost their nerve and they panicked. A recurrence of this was just what I was trying to prevent from happening in the delta, if I could. The corps commander was a very steady guy and was not likely to be panicked. He saw his situation clearly and was a good tactician.

Anyway, this was my appreciation of the situation, and I was sending it to Saigon, both through the defense attaché's military analyst attached to the CG and through my own channels. One of my young FSOs, a man named Dave Whitten, who wrote very well, and I were writing reports and sending through both the DAO and our own channels. That was our appreciation of it.

The CIA's appreciation was very different. They were seeing the collapse in the delta as imminent, with the North Vietnamese pouring into the center of Can Tho in an almost effortless thrust. As one of them put it, "They can be here in a half hour's time."

Of course, their own bad intelligence was taking a terrible toll on their nerves. The thing was feeding on itself.

On the morning of April 29 at about 1000 hours, I got a call on the direct telephone line from the embassy. It was Jacobson, the evacuation coordinator in the embassy in Saigon. In a calm voice he gave me the order to evacuate. He said the order had come from the President and we were to begin our evacuation at eleven o'clock. He then instructed me to evacuate by air, using the three Air America helicopters that were working in the delta. "You will be able to take only the Americans with you."

"You mean I can't take my Vietnamese?" I asked.

"No, you are to go by air as quickly as possible as we need your helicopters urgently to help with the evacuation of Saigon."

Well, I had heard earlier that morning, from the CIA guy who was running the helicopter air operations, that Tan Son Nhut had been bombed and that they had knocked out some of the small Air America Huey helicopters. I knew that the evacuation plan for Saigon called for using those small Hueys to pluck people off the tops of buildings. You've seen some of the famous pictures?

Q: Yes.

MCNAMARA: Well, if they had knocked out a number of the helicopters at Tan Son Nhut, that meant that their capacity to execute their plan would be reduced. Jake had said that my helicopters were urgently needed in Saigon. So I said to Jacobson, "Well, you know I want to take my Vietnamese out. As I've told you before, we are ready to go by water. I want permission to go that way."

He replied, "No, no, no."

I said, "Look, I know that you need helicopters desperately in Saigon."

He said, "That's right."

I said, "I know that Tan Son Nhut has been bombed. I've got helicopters here, and can release them more quickly if we evacuate by boat. Otherwise, it may take five or six hours to get the choppers to you in Saigon. You need them now, don't you?"

He said, "Yes."

I said, "They're out on missions now. We've got to get them back here. They must then be gassed up by hand pumps." (I wasn't letting the helicopters land at the airport because of the danger that Vietnamese soldiers might commandeer them at gun point.) "Then they would have to fly out to the fleet, gas up there, and fly back to Saigon. All of that will take at least five hours, probably longer, and you'll be lucky if you ever see those helicopters today. I know that this is part of your evacuation plan."

Just at that point, the line went dead. I tried everything to get back in touch with him, so I could continue to make my case and get permission to go by water.

I was going to go by water whether I got permission or not, but I preferred to go with permission. I respected Jacobson very much; he was trying to do what he thought was right and in our best interest. But I just didn't agree with him.

Anyway, I tried every means of getting back in contact with Jake. We tried radio nets through the Philippines, through Thailand, through ships at sea. Nothing worked. Time was passing. In desperation, I picked up the telephone again and it worked. I got through to Jake, and made my case again. Reluctantly, he agreed, "You've got your permission to go by water," he granted. "Just get the hell out of there."

I had finally worn him down. The whole world was ending around him, and he could not get me off the telephone.

"Just get out of there. And send those helicopters to Saigon as quickly as possible because we need them desperately." These were his last instructions to me.

Immediately after hanging up, I grabbed Kassebaum and Hasty (I wanted witnesses), and went to the CIA offices on the third floor of the CG. There, I told the CIA chief and a group of his subordinates that I had received the evacuation order from Saigon with permission to go by water. "We have been ordered to release the helicopters immediately. They are desperately needed in Saigon," I explained.

The CIA chief acknowledged my order to go by water, but asked that they be allowed to take their own motor boats that were fast and armed with machine guns. "We could run interference for you," the CIA chief explained to me.

I agreed, instructing him to meet us in the middle of the river at noontime. The time was then getting on to eleven o'clock. I concluded our conversation with an offer to take any of his people with us in the LCMs. The rendezvous in the middle of the river at twelve o'clock was set because our boats would be coming from different points along the river bank.

The CIA chief's name is Jim Delaney. He acknowledged my instructions with an unequivocal, "Yes, sir. No problem. We'll be there at twelve o'clock."

His deputy Fordick, repeated agreement that they would go by boat, and would meet us in mid-river.

Before leaving, I again told them to, "Send those helicopters to Saigon as quickly as possible."

In any event, the helicopters were never sent back to Saigon. Many of the people waiting on the roof tops were never evacuated. I understand that some of them were CIA employees. The Marine helicopters couldn't land on the roof tops because of their size and weight. But that was all part of the plan. It was perhaps too complicated, but that was an element in the evacuation. And so a lot of people got left in Saigon, including an awful lot of CIA agents, because they didn't get taken out of these compounds by helicopter, as was foreseen in the plan.

I then continued my rounds visiting all of the different elements in the CG. I issued the same evacuation order. In our plan, I was then to go to the dock at the CORDS compound and get the boats loaded and ready for departure. My deputy was to bring up the rear closing the office behind him. I went forward to get things moving.

I left the CG with Kassebaum, who was living in my house. We took my car to the house where we picked up guns, changed clothes, and picked up a few things to take with us. I didn't want to take much, because I didn't want the maids to know that I was leaving. If they knew, I feared they would spread the word quickly around town. We were being watched closely by the town's people. To prevent panicking them, I had issued orders that nobody could pack their household goods and ship them to Saigon without my specific permission. Some people snuck their stuff out without my knowing it. But the reason I said this was that people were watching us very closely, and the least thing could panic them.

I said nothing to my maids. I gathered up a few things, not much, just a few things.

Also staying with me was one of my future wife's brothers.

Q: She was Vietnamese.

MCNAMARA: She is Vietnamese, yes. I mean, we weren't engaged, at that time, we were just friends from the time I was in Danang.

Her brother had just arrived a day or two before. He had gotten himself out of Hue, Danang, and Nha-Trang. He was on a boat where some of the military ran amok killing, robbing and raping. The boat ultimately arrived in Phu Quoc Island. The soldiers on the boat that had mutinied raped killed and stole from the civilian refugees. Some were taken off the boat and executed by the Vietnamese Navy. The authorities were attempting to restore order by these drastic measures. My future brother-in-law came within an ace of being shot. He was saved by somebody who recognized him and convinced the naval officer in charge that the money he had was not stolen. My wife's family was among the richest in central Vietnam. He had not stolen from anybody. Once out of the clutches of the navy executors he got off Phu Quoc somehow and found his way to Saigon. His father was prepared to stay in Vietnam. He was a member of the old royal family, and wished to remain in his own country. But he sent his son down to me, to save him. He wanted his son to have a chance.

My future brother-in-law, my driver, Kassebaum and I got into the car for the short drive to the CORDS compound where the boat was docked. I'd left all of the money I had, for the maids, on top of my dresser, a big stack of piasters.

Q: About five or six inches tall.

MCNAMARA: Not quite, but all that I had. I hoped that they would get it before looters invaded the house. Given my system of priorities, I didn't feel that I could offer the maids a place in the boat.

When I arrived at the CORDS compound, the Marines had already started loading the boats. As people arrived they were hustled aboard the boats. I took up my stance near the entrance to the dock. I was determined to monitor who got on the boats. I feared overcrowding. I also wished to assure places were given those on our priority lists.

At some time during this period the Marines gave me a helmet liner that they had painted navy blue, with a big gold star on it, and an inscription: "Commodore of the Can Tho Yacht Club." (This is significant because of what I was accused of later.)

It was a joke. I put it on because I felt that one of the best ways of maintaining morale and preventing panic was to appear confident, even lighthearted. So I tried to joke with people and to relieve tension. The Vietnamese, naturally, were worried and scared. My young Marines and CORDS old-timers were businesslike but joined in my show of bravado. We tried hard to maintain a calm, matter-of-fact, businesslike front. As we started on this adventure, I was not as full of self-confidence as I tried to appear.

Anyway, they gave me the hat. I probably never should have put it on, but I did. And Kassebaum took some pictures of me with the hat on.

Later, I was accused by Frank Snepp, in his book...

Q: He was CIA.

MCNAMARA: He was a CIA guy in Saigon, who wrote a bitter denunciation of the whole evacuation and of the CIA station chief and of the management of the embassy.

Q: Decent Interval is the name of the book.

MCNAMARA: Decent Interval, yes. Some of it may be true, some of it is not. I have no idea what went on elsewhere in the country. But in the Mekong delta region, which was my area, he hadn't been there, didn't know anything about it personally, so he got his stories from his own former colleagues, the ones who ran away.

He accused me of having a Patton complex (General Patton), of being vainglorious, and by inference of being a little crazy because I decided to go out by water. He was not able to refute the fact that I got out and saved three hundred and some people. The "Patton" complex is pure bullshit. The fact is that we got out and we saved all of the Vietnamese for whom we had a responsibility, who wanted to go and who were in Can Tho at that time. That is the bottom line.

As we prepared to debark, I was getting people aboard the boats and the boats prepared for the trip down the river. People were coming into the compound and getting on the boats. Several CIA men came bringing people with them. I put them aboard while the CIA people left, ostensibly to join their comrades on their own smaller boats. General Nam's aide-de-camp and his wife and children arrived. Duc gave his family into my care, wished me luck and returned to his general's side. I was never sure whether this was an indication that Nam knew what I was doing. I suppose he did for he had already told me that he would never stand in the way of Americans leaving.

When I agreed to take Duc's family I asked him to say goodbye to the general for me. I probably should have gone to say goodbye myself, but I was afraid at that point that the general might stop me. I just couldn't take that chance. Also, I had to be present to make sure that everything went right at the loading. I didn't feel I could absent myself from the departure point. The decision had been taken by somebody else to leave, and I was under orders to get out of there. I was then focused on carrying out my orders. It might have been more gentlemanly to go and say goodbye in a civilized way, but this wasn't a civilized situation.

Anyway, Duc left his family. A CIA secretary, who was living in an apartment in the CORDS compound, who was later killed in Lebanon, Phyllis Filatchy, came out of her apartment as we were loading the boat, jumped in a car, and zipped off. I assumed she too would be on one of the CIA boats.

Loading continued. Back at the consulate general, Hank Cushing and Sergeant Hasty were closing up the office as if we were coming back at two o'clock after luncheon. They were showing people out, getting the place closed down, and getting other people down to us. Some of the Vietnamese that we had selected for evacuation told us no, they didn't want to go, they wanted to stay there. We agreed that was their choice.

I remember the cashier, a little Chinese girl, elected to stay. So we gave her money with instructions to pay anybody who hadn't been paid. There was a list of people who were owed their pay and separation settlement. We gave her the list and said, "When they come in or try to get in touch with us, then please pay them." I hope she gave them their money. I don't know whether she did or did not, but there wasn't anything else we could do. We didn't keep the money, we gave it to her. If she put it in her pocket, well...

We also tried to get hold of the people at the Vietnamese-American Association, which wasn't official, but it still had connections with USIS. There had been a USIS presence in Can Tho up until two or three months before the evacuation. The USIS branch PAO was then withdrawn. When he left, the Association became independent, but retained a connection with USIS. We couldn't get hold of anybody at their library. For a week or so before, we had tried to get people in USIS Saigon to make arrangements for the Association employees. We were never able to reach the PAO. We could never get anybody. The impression one got, from trying to talk to them, was of great chaos. They should have taken responsibility for the people who worked at the Association. At least, they might have told us what to do for them. We could have sent them to Saigon if we had some instruction from USIS. The head of the Association, whom I think may have been a U.S. government employee, was pregnant. She had gone home to Bac-lieu, a province south of Can Tho to have her baby. There was no way of getting her. The other ladies who ran the place were in town, but must have been taking a holiday while the boss was having her baby. We started calling them about ten-thirty but we were unable to reach them by the time we left the dock at 1200 hours.

At the same time, my vice consuls, and others, were going about town alerting people, picking them up, getting them down to the boats. The consular officer, Dave Shiachitano, went to people who were on his consular list, American citizens or those having close American associations. For instance, women who had children born of American fathers. He tried to convince them that their children, who had a claim on American citizenship, should be given an opportunity to go to America. He was able to convince some but not others. I remember, in the end, he failed with one girl. She just wouldn't leave. She was torn by indecision and fear. Reluctantly, he had to leave her and get on the boat.

As they were closing the consulate, Cushing and Hasty heard noise in one of the building's back rooms. Investigating the source of the noise, they found the CIA code clerk, trying to destroy his codes. For some reason, he wasn't able to do so, he just wasn't strong enough. He couldn't do it by himself. His colleagues had all departed leaving him alone. In their haste, they must have forgotten the poor devil. Fortunately, we had some cooler heads with us.

Earlier, before I left the consulate general, I was near the front door, when the CIA chief came down the front stairs from his offices. He was pulling two big mail bags behind him. They were obviously very heavy as they clunk, clunk, clunked down the steps. I imagined them to be full of gold bars. They seemed heavy enough and were emitting metallic sounds as they thudded in his wake. When he reached his car parked in front of the CG, he threw the bags into the back seat, pulled his poor, bewildered Vietnamese driver out of the driver's seat, jumped in, and sped off with tires squealing. The poor man looked frightened as hell. I am still puzzled as to what he was going to do with his heavily laden mail bags. Perhaps he still has them.

Getting back to the CIA code clerk, abandoned in the CG back room, Cushing and Hasty helped him destroy his codes and other classified gear and brought him with them down to our boat. At the time, I couldn't figure out what was holding Cushing up. I was on our radio calling to him to hurry as the tide was ebbing fast. Further delay risked hopelessly beaching our boats for hours until the next tide came in. Of course, I had no idea that our CIA colleagues had abandoned their communicator with his codes. Cushing replied to my pleas with a laconic, "We are coming." Hank, who recently died, was unflappable.

Finally, Cushing and Hasty arrived with the code clerk sitting between them in near hysteria. He could not find his girl friend. They had stopped by her house, but she was nowhere to be found. Finally, Cushing and Hasty had to drag the communicator with them for he was reluctant to leave without his friend.

We forced him to get on the boat. Suddenly, I heard shouts of joy. The girl was on the boat. She had come along with the consulate general employees fearing abandonment. They had a happy reunion. Incredibly, the CIA people had forgotten their communicator who was responsible for their most secret codes. They simply forgot him in their anxiety to get away.

Just as we were about to board the boat, Cushing's maid came out of his house screaming that she wanted to go, but that her son was still at school.

By this time, I realized that we would have enough room for people like her in our boat. Therefore, I had no reluctance to take any of our employees who were there and wanted to leave with us.

But the tide was ebbing and we had to leave. I told her that her son would have to arrive within the next few minutes or be left behind. She was distraught. Just at that point, a little kid, with a school bag, waltzed in the front gate of the compound. He was whistling, in no hurry, coming home from school. Why should he hurry? She rushed to the gate, grabbed him, hugged him, and jumped on the boat still sobbing.

I then gave orders for those still on the dock to get aboard. The Vietnamese crew of this LCM had jumped ship. I told Traister, who'd been guarding the boat, to start the engines. He was about half drunk, maybe more than half. He went to the engine room and knocked around. Somehow he started the engines. I'm not sure how he got the engines started, but he did, the engines were started. I took over the controls in the coxswain's compartment. I had been in the Navy and the Merchant Marine, but I had never run a boat like the LCM. I did understand the principles. In any case, there was no one else who had any significant nautical experience. So I took the controls of the boat and started trying to maneuver it off the mud bank. By this time, the tide was running out fast.

Suddenly a group of Filipinos came rushing down the dock dragging children, Vietnamese wives and girlfriends after them. They were CIA employees who had been abandoned. I stopped everything. Hasty rushed up the dock, grabbed them, and helped them get aboard. I too got off the boat to hustle them aboard. I was the last to board.

The boat was stuck in the mud but still in the water. With Traister's help, I violently maneuvered with both propellers until she became unstuck and off the bank. What a relief to be free of land and underway! My comfort was short-lived. We had a long-shafted outboard motor to propel the rice barge. In getting off the mud bank, the propeller had broken. The barge was dead in the water. There was nothing to do but tow it with the Mike boat. Mike boats have two powerful diesel engines. We threw ropes to Cushing who was on the barge with our GSO, Walt Hileman, a former merchant seaman and a mechanical genius. A very useful guy to have around. With the barge under tow we started out into the main stream of the river.

Just as we were getting underway, two helicopters flew overhead. The deputy chief of the CIA informed us by radio, that they had gotten permission "from Saigon" to use the helicopters in their evacuation. Therefore, they were taking the helicopters out to the evacuation fleet. Would we like some assistance, he asked? I could only conclude that they had disregarded my orders and taken the helicopter despite the desperate need for them in Saigon. I was never able to ascertain who might have given them permission to take the helicopter. It certainly was not Jacobson who later denied any knowledge of their request. He described their action as "piracy." Certainly, it was extremely irresponsible. No doubt the result of their panic. I was furious, but I was trying to maneuver the boat. So I told whoever was talking to them on the radio to tell them to please remind the Navy that we needed help when we arrived at the mouth of the river. We could also use some air support on the way down the river. I was never able to learn whether they made any effort to pass this information on to Naval authorities.

Anyway, whzzt, they were gone. I heard later that when they were taking the helicopters, their Nung guards (Chinese Nung's who were supposed to be very reliable mercenaries) held them up at gunpoint. They relieved our CIA friends of gold and dollars. Maybe that mail sack that seemed full of gold was part of the Nung's payoff.

We were now on our way down the river. The second Mike boat (LCM) that had been tied up at the Shell dock was also on its way down river, just ahead of us. We took up position behind it. The crew of this second boat had not run away. A former Vietnamese naval officer was in charge. He knew the river very well. I still had the rice barge in tow. In total there were some three hundred Vietnamese, eighteen Americans, and five or six Filipinos in the three boats.

We continued on down the river for some 6-7 miles past Can Tho. To our north, over Vinh-long. The river there is very wide. We could see a helicopter firing its machine guns at something on the ground. We could see the tracer bullets flying in both directions. The war continued.

Off to the port side, some Vietnamese navy boats were approaching on an intersecting course. They were "monitors" whose armored turrets mounted 40- and 20-millimeter guns. Pretty formidable stuff. Suddenly, the lead monitor fired a machine gun volley over the bow of the leading LCM. The signal was unmistakable. I gave the order to stop. There wasn't any way that we could outrun them, and there was no way that we could outfight them. The only thing to do was stop and talk to them. I had women and children in all three boats. Good God, we could have had a massacre if they'd ever started shooting with the 40- millimeter guns at our boats.

We were stopped. A lieutenant, junior grade, who was in charge of the flotilla of navy boats said that he was under instructions from the corps commander to stop us. General Nam believed that we had South Vietnamese army personnel and draft-aged males on the boats. He wanted us to be brought back to Can Tho, to check the boat for deserters.

The navy people wanted to come on board our boats. I refused to let them come aboard. We were at an impasse surrounded in mid-stream with awesome 40- and 20-millimeter guns pointed down our throats. Most of the males on our three boats were heavily armed. If the navy people had come on the boat and tried to take any of the Vietnamese off, there could have been a shootout. I could not allow this to happen. All three boats were full of women and children.

Certainly, General Nam had good reason to have us stopped. A senior Vietnamese air force colonel was on my boat. He had been the deputy base commander at Ben Thuy. I knew him very well. He had come down at the last minute. I thought he was there to bid goodbye to the Shell Oil manager who was a close friend. Unbeknownst to me, he shed his uniform and hid on the boat. One of my Americans identified him only after we had begun our voyage. By that time, there wasn't anything to do except throw him over the side. I could not do that. I was angry and disgusted with him, but I didn't feel there was anything I could do about it. I would not have minded the navy taking him, but I couldn't give him up without giving up some of our employees who were of military age.

Luckily, two weeks before, I had made an agreement with Commodore Thang who was in charge of the South Vietnamese navy in the Mekong delta. I got his wife and children evacuated through Saigon in return for a promise of help should we have difficulty in our river borne evacuation. He owed me a favor. I wasn't very sure whether he would or could honor our agreement under these circumstances. Nevertheless, I asked the navy lieutenant to get in touch with Commodore Thang and inform him that we were being held. I offered to allow the Commodore to inspect the boats if he would meet us in mid-river. I did not want to return to Can Tho not knowing whether we would ever be able to leave again.

The lieutenant was friendly, but some of his sailors were not. They looked potentially dangerous. Obviously, they resented our leaving.

As requested, the lieutenant got Thang on the radio. The Commodore offered to come immediately to resolve the impasse.

We were held for about an hour and a half waiting Thang. When he arrived in a small boat, we greeted each other as friends. He smiled at me, "You don't have any officers, soldiers or males of military age on your boats, do you?"

"Of course, not," I replied. "The people in our boats are all my employees and their families."

"Right. Then I see no reason to bring you back to Can Tho. I'll go back and tell the corps commander that I have inspected the boats and found no one on the prohibited categories.

He was really a smart cookie. He had taken the precaution of bringing a young sailor with him whose aged father was on one of our boats. He encouraged the sailor to say goodbye to his father in full view of all of the other sailors. It was a very touching goodbye; the young sailor was staying behind. This disarmed the other sailors whose animosity disappeared.

To further ease tensions, I gave the sailors our rice barge. It was more a hindrance to us with its broken propeller. We took the people who had been on the rice barge and divided them among the two LCMs. This meant that all our people were in modern, sea worthy craft behind protective armor. I was greatly relieved.

We loaded lots of supplies on the LCMs including military rations and water. To raise morale among our passengers, I allowed the distribution of some of our rations. They disappeared among the family groups as if by magic.

While we were stopped, I told my Americans to disarm all Vietnamese. The fact that they'd give their guns up to us was important. It was a sign of trust. Perhaps, they had no choice, but we got no resistance. My men circulated among the Vietnamese reassuring them in their own language. We kept all of the guns on the top of the engine compartment behind my steering post. The Marines were there to guard them. We also had a machine gun off one side and a BAR (Browning automatic rifle) off the other side. All of the Americans were armed. As my own protection, I had my Gurkha kukri from Katanga. It meant a great deal to me. I could not leave it behind. Besides, it might come in handy.

Q: You're talking about...

MCNAMARA: This is a Nepalese Gurkha knife that was given to me by Colonel Matra of the 3/1 Gurkha battalion in Katanga. I had been made an honorary Gurkha in Katanga during my times there living with the Gurkhas. My kukri was one of the few things I brought with me in the evacuation. Other than that, I had little more than the clothes on my back, an old pair of dungarees and a sports shirt. However, I did have the damned helmet the Marines had given me. We took some pictures on the boat with me at the helm of the boat. One of those pictures got into the State magazine. I was at the helm of the boat wearing the helmet and sun glasses. It did come in handy, however, when it rained later on our trip down river. It helped keep the rain out of my eyes as I stood in the open steering cockpit.

After Thang released us we recommenced our journey down river. It was about two or three o'clock in the afternoon. The tide was running out fast which was useful in giving us additional speed. This was important in my calculations as I wanted to reach the mouth of the river during daylight. I was not so confident of our ability to navigate on the river in the dark. I had only an Army grid map that did give depths for the river. It's accuracy, however, was somewhat questionable. Channels often changed in rivers that were not dredged. I had marked what I thought to be the deepest channels as I overflew the river. This helped but was not infallible. Luckily the Vietnamese commander of the other boat knew the river well. I followed him, for the most part, through the seventy miles from Can Tho to the sea.

About 30-45 minutes after our release by the Vietnamese navy we were cruising down the river when, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a flash. I turned my head instinctively in that direction. To my horror, I saw a long rocket with flame at the rear. I remember the smoke coming out of the back of the rocket, with the flame. Jesus Christ, I jammed the throttles to full speed. If I could have pushed them any further, I would have. I said to the Marines, "Hey, we've just been fired on by a rocket! Shoot at the source of the fire on the right bank!" One of the young Marines was behind a BAR on that side of the boat. There was an M-60 machine gun on the other side. He had never seen a BAR before. They were first developed in World War I. Certainly, this model was of WWII vintage. It was procured informally from a Vietnamese source to round out our armament. Nothing like it had been issued to American troops in 20 years.

Q: It was really World War I, I think. [Produced in the U.S. beginning in 1918.] It was an automatic, but very heavy, sort of like a machine gun.

MCNAMARA: An automatic rifle, but very, very heavy. Marvelous weapon, but it was too heavy to carry. But, anyway, he jammed the goddamned thing and couldn't get it to fire. So one of my CORDS guys, who had been in Quang-tri with the Air Force, but on the ground, picked it up, cleared it, and then fired a clip of ammo to show him how it worked. The young Marines had never been in combat. Another one had an M-60, and he aimed it horizontally and fired. The M-60 is like a mortar; you have to aim it upwards to get trajectory. The goddamned thing went out a little ways from the boat and exploded. Another of my old CORDS hands grabbed the grenade launcher, reloaded it and fired it properly.

Q: Basically, it's a grenade launcher, isn't it?

MCNAMARA: Yes, it goes up and down in a mortar-like trajectory.

Anyway, we put up a tremendous volume of fire. Some of the Vietnamese got hold of M-16's and supplemented fire by the Marines and my CORDS people. One or two rockets were fired and we put up such a volume of fire that they must have decided to leave us alone.

The rockets passed near our stern scaring the hell out of us but doing no damage. It's pretty hard to hit a moving boat in the middle of a wide river.

We were now approaching the narrowest part of the river. The channel flowed between islands. It was a well-known infiltration route used by the North Vietnamese, moving from one part of the Mekong delta to another. The VC held the banks on both sides of the river and often occupied the islands in mid-stream. The channel narrowed as it passed between the island. We would be dangerously close to shore. This was certainly the most perilous part of the trip down river.

Before we got to this narrow part, a U.S. Navy F-4 flew very high over us, and did a barrel roll. I optimistically thought, "The Navy now knows where we are. They will protect us. We even have air cover." I had asked for air coverage to suppress anybody who wanted to screw with us. There it was, our U.S. Navy's F-4 fighter plane up in the sky, doing a barrel roll.

Less encouraging, the CIA communicator that we had rescued after his abandonment had several radios. He used every frequency imaginable. No one would answer. Finally, we put out an international "May Day" distress signal. Still no reply. Just as we were coming to the narrow part of the river, heavy rains began to fall. Providentially, a deluge obscured us as we passed between the islands. At times, the banks seemed close enough to touch. The VC aren't stupid, however, they get in out of the rain. Navigation was a problem during the rains. I could see very little ahead of our boat. We would have had difficulty following the channel without the experienced Vietnamese captain in the lead boat. I might have run the boat onto a sandbar.

The rain covering our passage through this very dangerous patch was another piece of extraordinary good luck. Oddly, it stopped soon after we emerged into the wide river below the islands.

We continued down the river. There was no traffic on the river until we came upon a boat coming towards us from the opposite direction. It was the first boat we had encountered since leaving the navy. Normally, that river was full of traffic. That day there was none. I suppose, the river folk were also frightened of what was happening. As we approached the other boat, I maneuvered so that we would pass to port side. I had the M-60 machine gun on that side, with my trusty Hasty all set to fire. As we came abreast of the boat, you couldn't see anybody on board. Then a woman and a child came on the deck. They were quickly past us. It was an innocent small cargo boat by the looks of it. There wasn't anything to be alarmed about.

At about seven o'clock, we reached the mouth of the river. There was a peaceful looking little fishing village on the left-hand side as we came down the river. Many fishing boats were anchored off the village, but there was no sign of life in the village itself. It looked deserted, but obviously was not. The fishing boats were all in good condition, bobbing at anchor just off the village. Their owners were not far off. No doubt, they were too frightened to show themselves to our heavily armed flotilla.

We still were unable to raise any response on our radios, nor did we see the promised ship off the mouth of the river. I remember Christian advising that we stay in the mouth of the river overnight. "Let's not go out to sea." He and others were afraid of the sea. Like so many people who have no experience with the water, they were naturally apprehensive about going out to sea in those small, open boats. There was an island at the entrance to the river from the sea. They wanted me to tie up there and stay overnight. The next morning, they reasoned, we would have a better chance of finding the ship.

I vetoed this option. I did not want to stay in the mouth of the river. I was fearful that someone might come to interfere with us in the middle of the night. We knew that the VC controlled at least one bank and possibly both banks of the river. We had just had a run-in with the South Vietnamese navy. We did not need any more of that. The safest thing to do, I reckoned, was to go out to sea. Get about three or four miles offshore, and then we would be safe. The VC don't have a navy. Nobody was likely to bother us out there. The boats were seaworthy enough in a reasonably calm sea. Being a former sailor, I felt safer at sea than I did on land. But most of the people with me were land oriented. They were afraid of the sea. The unknown was what frightened them.

Since I was in charge, I decided to put to sea. No one questioned my decision, or my right to make it. We could discuss options, but, when a decision was taken, all loyally followed instructions. To maintain morale, I insisted that the U.S. Navy must be just over the horizon. They've probably got us on radar right now. They wouldn't abandon us. The American Navy has traditions to uphold. Honor would never allow them to abandon friends in peril on the sea. Moreover, the Task Force representatives had promised that a ship would be waiting for us. We only had to get far enough out to sea. The water's too shallow in here for them to bring a ship in, I reasoned. They will find us with their radar if we get away from the land.

I wasn't quite as confident as I made out. Nonetheless, I would not stay in the mouth of that river overnight. It would have been a stupid thing to do. The people who made the suggestion weren't stupid, but they also weren't seamen.

Symbolically, as the sun set, we left Vietnam. I could see the channel out to sea marked on my map. Depths were deepest on a line going in a southeasterly direction. Obviously this was the main channel. We just went in that direction. In any case, I had the captain of the other boat to follow, so I didn't have any problems.

I remember looking back as the sun set over the Mekong delta for the last time. God, it was beautiful. A beautiful big red-orange sunset over the flat, lush region. I had been entranced with the beauty of the delta ever since I first arrived some five years before. It was so beautiful, especially at sunset.

Anyway, I remember thinking, "This will be the last time that I'll see this."

Then I turned around to more important things, like which direction we should take once clear of the channel. To my sorrow, I discovered, at this late date, that there was no compass in my boat. Someone must have stolen it. We could not be sure of our directions. The night became increasingly dark with low cloud cover obscuring the stars.

There were many lights out at sea. I found they were attached to fishing nets laid there in the shallow water. At first, we were fooled by these lights thinking they might be boats from our expected navy ship. There was no one.

My only point of reference was the flashes from a tremendous battle going on onshore, near the little district town that I had visited several times in Vinh-binh province. The district chief was a guy I'd nicknamed "Snuffy Smith," after a comic hillbilly strip character. My Snuffy was a Vietnamese version of the "good ol' boy." He had an undecipherably strong rural accent. Despite his rank as a major in the army, he looked and dressed like the local fishermen and rice farmers. He was the chief of a district that had been surrounded and under siege for years. The rounds and sights of heavy combat that guided us away from Vietnam must have been his final battle.

After several hours of searching in vain, we had all but given up for the night.

First, I tried to tie the two boats together so that we would not be separated in the night. This did not work. The boats beat against one another in the swell. We risked putting a hole in one of the boats.

Then, I decided that we'd tie up the boats to the buoys holding the fishing nets. They must have anchors that kept the fishing nets in place. We could lay there over night. The next morning either the Navy would find us, or we would run northwards parallel to the coast to where I knew the evacuation fleet was anchored off Vung-tau. All you had to do was keep the coast to your left. It would be uncomfortable to spend a night on the open sea but we were safe enough. The next day we would certainly find the fleet, one way or another.

My only questions were: What was the range of the boats? How much fuel do we have? Could we make it that far?

I found out, later on, that the boats could have gone all the way to the Philippines with the amount of fuel we had.

But I didn't know that at the time. I was worried about that. And it was hard to communicate with the captain on this other boat. Finally, I put Mr. Christian, my admin officer, on the other boat.

Q: Mr. Christian, from Mutiny on the Bounty.

MCNAMARA: He didn't mutiny, although he was one of those who really didn't want to go down the river. Later on, he admitted that it was the only thing to do. He admitted to me that he'd made a mistake and that I was right. The water evacuation was the best option we had. He was very bitter about the way the CIA people had deserted us and run away. Later, he made some strong accusations to the press.

As we were about to lay to for the night, we saw some especially bright lights in the distance. I didn't know for sure if it was a ship. But we decided to make for the lights. It turned out to be a ship, called The Pioneer Contender, an American freighter owned by the President Line. In fact, it was the freighter that the spooks had asked be sent down to lay off the coast to evacuate their people. There it was, anchored off the coast. It was well lit. The ship had a Marine contingent aboard as guards. As we came alongside, they were not happy about these strange boats coming out of the night. Initially, they were reluctant to let us come aboard. Finally, we convinced them that we were fellow Americans and not pirates or VC saboteurs.

It was a ship on which they'd had some awful experiences in the evacuation from Danang. Vietnamese soldiers had run amok raping, stealing and killing. There was mayhem on the ship. The crew locked themselves up in their quarters and ran the ship. Vietnamese gangs took over the rest of the ship.

Understandably, the Marines were apprehensive. They didn't know who these madmen were, coming alongside in a boat in the middle of the night off a hostile coast. The unknown is always a little frightening, and they didn't expect us.

Christian finally got aboard. He explained who we were and where we had just come from. Still wary, the Marines agreed to take us aboard. Rope slings were lowered into our boats. Our passengers were loaded into the slings and hauled up onto the deck. The Vietnamese were put down into the hold, where there were other Vietnamese. Some of them, maybe all of them, had been evacuated by the CIA people from the delta.

By this time, I'd been at the helm of our boat for over thirteen hours without a break. I was exhausted; my legs were starting to turn to rubber. But until we got everybody on board, I wasn't going to leave the helm, because I felt responsible for the boat. We could not abandon it.

We unloaded the other boat first, and then I brought my boat alongside. They told me, from the ship, that the Navy wanted our Mike boats in Vung-tau to evacuate people over the beach. So I said, "Okay, we'll run the boats up there." Hasty and Cushing volunteered to stay with me to run our boat. The Vietnamese crew would remain with the other boat. I was exhausted. Hasty agreed to run the boat while I slept on an Army stretcher that had gotten onto the boat. We were going to follow the Pioneer Contender, leaving the next morning for Vung-tau.

Christian had gotten onto the ship where he ran into an American CIA man from Can Tho. The Filipinos, who were with us, had worked for him. Christian made a deal with the Filipinos to run the boats for us up to Vung-tau. We would take them over again for the evacuation from Vung-tau. He paid them with cash he brought from the CG.

We got on the ship. The Marine captain in charge of the security detail was very officious and not very welcoming. It was difficult to explain to him who we were and what a Consul General was doing wondering about in the South China Sea. Still skeptical, he took me to the ship captain's stateroom. The captain was there with his chief engineer and chief officer. They knew what a Consul General was. Quickly, they sat me down and gave me a cold beer. Then they put me in a stateroom that the CIA man had occupied. I even got a shower. Sadly, I was the only one in my crew who got a bed that night. Well, the Vietnamese were okay, because they were down in the hold where it was dry and clean. They had facilities there; with food and water. My Americans had to sleep on deck. It was cold and wet; it had been raining, and they had to sleep outside.

Christian, at this point, had what looked like a heart attack. He was an overweight, fifty-five to sixty year old retired colonel. He had exerted himself tremendously during the past month. The pressure had been intense on all of us. But Christian had probably more than his share. We put him in a bunk. The Marine medic gave him some medicine and calmed him and tried to take care of him as best he could.

I went in to see him, and he said, "Terry, you were right. This was the only way of getting out. We never would have gotten out otherwise." He admitted that going down the river was the right thing to have done under the circumstances. It was nice to have somebody who had been completely against it admit that. I had never been very close to him. I was close to most of the other people, but we had never been very close, he and I. But that bonded us, that experience.

Anyway, we were on the ship, we were safe. But they hadn't been waiting for us, didn't expect us. There was no Navy ship anywhere near the mouth of the Mekong. The Navy had simply forgotten. Later on, I asked a Navy captain in the evacuation fleet, "Didn't you hear us on the radio?"

"Oh, yeah, sure," he replied.

"Then, why didn't you answer?" I asked.

"Oh, communications security. Our communications were blacked out because of communication security," he told me as a matter of fact.

I thought for a moment of "Catch-22," or was it Alice in Wonderland? Unbelievable, but true.

After visiting our Vietnamese passengers and my American crew, I went to bed.

The next morning, I woke to the gentle movement of the ship as it bobbed along. They'd actually gotten underway while I was sleeping, and we were on our way to Vung-tau. I got up, went down, talked to my guys, and saw that they were all okay. I'd looked in on them the night before and made sure they were okay. The next morning, I got them to come up to my cabin for showers.

Then I went up to the pilot house and asked the captain if I could use his radio, to try to get us off that ship and onto one of the ships in the evacuation fleet. There wasn't any room for us on the Pioneer Contender. I couldn't let my guys sleep out in the open. I got some pretty nasty remarks from Navy people over the radio; telling me to shut up. Not a very pleasant welcome from uninformed bureaucrats.

However, some USAID logistics guys heard me. And they had taken a tugboat from Newport...

Q: Just out of Saigon.

MCNAMARA: Just out of Saigon. A Japanese tugboat with an Australian captain that was on charter to USAID. The logistics chief from Newport said, "We're coming to get you." These were some of our comrades; these were guys who knew who we were and were sympathetic. So they said, "We've got an LST anchored" (someplace or other). "We'll come and get you in the tugboat, then we'll take you to our LST."

The coordination was made. We were picked up by the tugboat, which had pulled barges filled with Vietnamese out of Saigon. It also looked as though they'd looted the commissary and PX in Newport. "Liberated" is probably the better word.

Q: Requisitioned.

MCNAMARA: Requisitioned, whatever, because they had all the goddamned supplies you could ever want on there, cases of everything lying all over the decks of the tugboat. The Australian captain said he was going to take the boat back to Australia. What he was going to do with it when he got to Australia wasn't clear to me. Whether the owner was ever going to see it or not, I don't know. But, anyway, that wasn't my concern.

They took us down to a rusty old Korean LST, which was leased by USAID logistics, and we got aboard. Again, there was no place indoors to sleep. All of us, me included, were sleeping out in the open now. We spent two nights sleeping out on the deck on this Korean LST. There wasn't enough food for everybody. The Koreans did their best. It was, again, an LST under charter to USAID, and a lot of these USAID guys were on it, with their Vietnamese girlfriends. They, of course, had taken all the staterooms. By the time we got aboard, there was nothing left but the deck. Anyway, we slept on the deck, and I bombarded the Navy to get us the hell off there.

After two days, helicopters took us off the LST to the evacuation command ship.

I had gotten rid of all the shoulder-held weapons; I left them on the Mike boats. But we still had pistols and knives and things like that. We looked like cutthroats. So, as we got on the command ship, they took our pistols away and gave us chits for them. Of course, we never got them back. Navy men love souvenirs.

The ship was crowded with refugees, but it was a huge ship, with troop compartments on it. They normally would carry large numbers of Marines. The decks were made for helicopter lands and takeoffs. It was an assault command ship. We were taken down to the wardroom for processing when we got aboard the Blue Ridge. Tables were set up for processing. We were debriefed. The Marine colonel, to whom I'd talked in Saigon about evacuation and who was there when the Navy guys had promised me a ship would be waiting at the river mouth said, "You mean, they didn't send a ship for you?"

And I replied, "Hell no."

Anyway, he said he was very proud of us. He took my Marines in tow immediately and had them sent off to be bedded down with the ship's Marines. He went over and talked to some of the officers on the ship, and we were treated royally. I was given the chaplain's stateroom. All my Americans were berthed in officer's staterooms. We were treated like heroes. In contrast, people coming from Saigon, even Jacobson, who had been a senior officer at the embassy, were living in the troop compartments, sleeping in ten-high bunks. You know what they look like.

Q: Oh, I crossed the Atlantic in one of those. Pretty awful.

MCNAMARA: That's what they did with these very senior people from Saigon.

Q: Blue Ridge was the name of the ship.

MCNAMARA: Blue Ridge that was it, exactly. So, anyway, we were treated royally, as heroes. We'd come out, flying our flags.

Q: Had you flown a flag, by the way?

MCNAMARA: I did, indeed. I had American flags up. As we got to the mouth of the river, I put the consulate flag on a boathook, as a flagpole, and we flew that from the bow. Oh, yes, we went out, flags flying.

We were really the only people who weren't traumatized in the whole thing, as far as I could see. Others looked beaten and depressed. My gang were upbeat. We had done what we had planned to do. We'd gotten ourselves and our people out. Nobody helped us. I was very proud of the guys that I was with, and they were all proud of having been part of what we'd done.

On a Navy ship, they have a police force. The head is called a chief master-at-arms. He's the big gun, a senior petty officer. I'd been in the Navy, as an enlisted man, and I knew the structure. I knew that if I really wanted to get anything on that ship, the way to do it was not to talk to the officers, but to talk to the chiefs and the senior petty officers. That's the way the Navy works.

Anyway, the word got around that we were the guys from Can Tho who'd toughed it out and gotten ourselves out, in a sort of Terry-and-the-Pirates mode.

Somebody told the master-at-arms that I was a general. I was a consul general at the time, but they forgot the consul.

Q: One can end up as consul general at about a major-general or a rear-admiral rank, if you're playing around with those things.

MCNAMARA: Well, sure. In any case, the billet called for an FSO-1, which is certainly major-general rank. I wasn't an FSO-1, but that's what the job called for.

Anyway, they started calling me "General." And the chief master-at-arms came over and said, "Sir, please, sit down. We'll serve you."

The other evacuees were waiting in long lines. I had my group with me, so I said, "Well, my staff..."

"Sir, this table is yours."

He got a big sign: RESERVED. So we had our own table. My Marines started telling sea stories to the other Marines and then to the sailors. We were celebrities.

I had the chaplain's stateroom, and my other guys had other staterooms. The Marines, of course, were billeted with the other Marines. But we all stayed together, absolutely together, a tight-knit group.

I said, "We've got to have an office." I asked the chief master-at-arms, "Who can get me an office?"

And he said, Chief somebody or other; I don't remember the chief's name. "The chief runs everything on this ship. You've got to talk to him. I will make an appointment."

I said, "Right."

And he said, "He'll come here."

I said, "No, no, no, I'll go to him. Where's his stateroom?"

He sent one of his sailors to guide me to a press center organized for journalists.

They called the chief from the center to announce my arrival. He told them to "send the general down."

The general went to talk to the chief. And the chief was a sergeant Bilko type, a wheeler-dealer.

Q: Sergeant Bilko was a TV character who was a wheeler-dealer.

MCNAMARA: A wheeler-dealer in the military sense. This guy was just that sort of person. He'd been up night and day, organizing things and running around frenetically, but obviously knew what he was doing and controlled everything. A little bit like the Mafia, you know, and he was the godfather.

Anyway, I told him, "Chief, I'm the consul general from Can Tho. My people and I need an office where we can set up our 'Can Tho at sea' office."

The chief said, "Right, general. I have just the place for you. The chaplain is not on the ship now; he's on leave. You get the chaplain's office."

So I took over the chaplain's office. We put up appropriate signs: "Consulate General, Can Tho," et cetera. And we set up a duty roster for the Marines. I had the place manned night and day, twenty-four hours a day, telephone watches were always in touch with me by phone. The master-at-arms in the mess hall had coffee cake and cookies sent down on a regular basis. He got the mess cooks to serve us. We had virtually anything we wanted on the ship, without moving out of our office. So we were all set up on the ship. We had absolutely no problems, and we were well looked after.

We were next to the press center. Journalists were in and out. They couldn't quite figure out who the hell we were, but, anyway, there we were. Some of them talked to my guys, and some of my guys (Christian, for instance) told them some awful things about the CIA.

Graham Martin, the ambassador, found out I was aboard. He sent word that he wanted to see me. I too wanted to call on him to wish him well. He was sick with pneumonia. He had the admiral's stateroom, way up in the superstructure. When I arrived, he congratulated me on having gotten out and gotten my people out. He had his public affairs advisor, a man named John Hogan, with him. I had known John from East Africa when he was the PAO (public affairs officer) in Nairobi. Martin told John to set up a press conference for me, to tell my story, because he wanted some positive stories to get out about what had happened, and thought that mine was one of the better ones. Graham Martin told me not to say anything about the CIA, that he would take care of them.

Q: You had told him...

MCNAMARA: Yes, I had told him the whole story of what had happened. And he said, "Don't say anything about it. Don't you get involved in it. I'll take care of them. And tell your guys not to say anything."

So (perhaps I shouldn't have, but I did) I said, okay. I went down and dutifully told my guys. But I couldn't control them all. I told him that. I said, "I can't control all these people. There's no way of stopping them from talking to the press if they want to. But I'll talk to them and ask them not to, and pass on your assurance that you will take care of this."

I felt strongly that a lawful order had been disobeyed by the CIA contingent in Can Tho. But more seriously, they had compromised the safety of other Americans and the safety of a lot of Vietnamese, not just in Can Tho, but in Saigon, too, by taking those helicopters.

I also brought up the question of the division of authority and responsibility, or the lack of authority and responsibility. It was the source of many of our problems. Obviously, that wasn't something that you could charge the CIA rank and file with. It wasn't of their making. It was something that Graham Martin himself should have dealt with earlier on. He should have brought the CIA under control. He didn't. It was his own fault, as much as anybody else's. If he couldn't do it, he should have gone to the president. And if that didn't work, he should have resigned. Perhaps, his responsibility was even more profound. He may have encouraged the divisions that caused him so many problems.

Q: This was the way he operated. He was renowned for never letting one side know what the other side was doing.

MCNAMARA: He wanted to have a division of responsibility. He wanted to get reporting from them and from the consulate general, independently. I can understand that to a degree, in terms of reporting. In terms of intelligence, I can understand it. But in terms of operations, it was disastrous. It was disastrous in Saigon, and it was almost disastrous in Can Tho. It wasn't quite, because we were very lucky and better organized.

Q: Did you have the press conference?

MCNAMARA: I had a press conference and told our story. Some newspapermen wrote it up. Our story got into Time. Time International, anyway. It was published somehow or other in an English-language newspaper in Saudi Arabia. I got a copy of the article from a neighbor of my ex-wife's family, who was in Saudi Arabia. He got the thing, tore it out, and sent it to her to send to me. A little roundabout, but, anyway. I don't know what other coverage it got, but I saw the article in either Time or Newsweek. Oh, and there was something in The Economist. Our adventure was given minor notice. And that's what it was, it was a sideshow. The major story was the evacuation from Saigon. Obviously, Can Tho was just an interesting aside.

Q: Shall we stop here, do you think?

MCNAMARA: Yes.

Q: When we pick this up the next time, we'll talk about what happened thereafter, and continue your career.

Today is September 17, 1993. Terry, we left you last time on the Blue Ridge. How did you get back and what was your reception?

MCNAMARA: The Blue Ridge landed in the Philippines, at Subic Bay Naval Base. They put us through customs there, and they tried to take my treasured kukri from me.

Q: That was your Gurkha knife.

MCNAMARA: My Gurkha knife, which was given to me in Katanga. And I argued. I said, "I'm going to stay here forever if you don't let me keep that knife, because it means a lot to me." They finally worked themselves up to a Navy captain, who realized that it was a waste of time to argue, so he said, "Go ahead, keep the knife."

So we got on a C-47, on our way to the embassy in Manila. The C-47 was almost flipped over by a crosswind as we were landing in Manila. That would have been ironic after our departure from Vietnam.

Q: That was an old plane.

MCNAMARA: We landed in Manila and went to the embassy. There was great confusion, lots of people from Vietnam. Martin and Wolfgang Lehmann were there with many others from embassy Saigon. A friend of mine, Frazier Meade, was the political counselor in Manila. He gave us the use of an officer in his section of the embassy. While there, we began writing efficiency reports and citations. I decided that everyone who came down the river should be given a medal for courage.

The strong cohesion of my people from Can Tho was maintained in Manila. While there we decided that we wanted to go to Guam, as a group, to find and help the Vietnamese who had come out with us, and others from Can Tho who may have gotten themselves to Guam. Many of my guys were Vietnamese speakers. In any case, even the ones who didn't, certainly understood a great deal about Vietnam, far more than most people in Guam.

Wolfgang Lehmann said, "Absolutely not. You've got to go back to the United States, and you've got to go back quickly."

I appealed his refusal to Martin, who said, "Of course, you can go."

A cable was sent to Guam offering our services. They wouldn't take us as a group but were willing to take most of us as individual volunteers. I stayed in Guam for several weeks where I found a number of former employees from Can Tho. Others were there for several months.

The former Consul General from III Corps was there as a State Department representative. He wanted to leave and asked me to take his place. Initially, I was receptive until I met the Admiral in charge of the military's operation. He made it very clear that there would be no real role for a senior civilian on Guam. The military were in charge and saw no reason to share any of their authority or responsibility. I understood his point of view, and concluded that I would only be frustrated if I remained on Guam.

Q: Just a quick thing on Guam. The evacuation was so fast, and so many people were pouring in, how did you find the sorting out? I heard a story from Clayton McManaway, saying that a couple of guys didn't even know where they were. They were just a couple of fishermen and were picked up by the thing. It must have been sort of a mess. How was the sorting out going on?

MCNAMARA: Clayton McManaway wasn't there.

Q: No, I know, but he heard these stories.

MCNAMARA: Well, it was a mess, but it was amazing how well the armed services had things organized in Guam, which was the first real point of arrival on U.S. territory for most Vietnamese evacuees. Several large camps had been set up. They had social services organized. Water, food and all of the necessities were in place. By the time I got there immigration people were starting to work. There was confusion, but it was far better organized than anyone could have expected. The military did a superb job.

One problem we were able to work on was to reuniting of families. Many had been separated and were desperate to find family and friends. The language problems often prevented most Vietnamese from communicating with their American hosts.

My group from Can Tho found a nucleus of Vietnamese-speaking Americans who served as ombudsmen with the American authorities. Records were made of every person who arrived on the island. Many people were able to locate missing friends and family members with the help of our informal interventions. We set up an information booth in the middle of the camp, with big signs in Vietnamese: "Information. Come here and we'll try to sort out your problems." I had a lot of young and no-so-young people, and they went out and tried to find people and sort out personal problems for disturbed, confused Vietnamese.

No, I don't think that it was as confusing as I would have expected it to be.

The whole evacuation, in fact, was less confusing than anyone could ever have expected. When has anyone ever tried to evacuate that many people by air from a city under siege? It's never been done before. It was a major accomplishment in terms of the logistics of the evacuation itself.

Q: Well, then you came back. This would be when?

MCNAMARA: This was May.

Q: You came back to Washington in May.

MCNAMARA: Well, I went by way of the camp in California.

Q: Pendleton?

MCNAMARA: Yes. I stayed at Camp Pendleton for about a week, looking, again, for people from Can Tho, to see who might have gotten out and to see if I could help any of them.

After spending about a week there, I then made my way onwards to Washington, where my reception at the State Department was one of indifference.

At Pendleton, for instance, the reception was very warm. Nick Thorne was in charge there, and he took me out with all of the people I knew who were working there, and we had a big reunion.

In Washington, it was far cooler. A lot of people were very ambivalent about the whole thing. Some of them seemed to feel that the victims were somehow or other responsible. Perhaps that often happens. I have heard similar comments from people evacuated from other countries in less controversial circumstances.

Q: This is one of the reasons why I'm getting you and others to talk about this. I was just talking to one of our people, and I'd said I'd gathered together a whole bit of information, accounts about Vietnam. And he said, "Well, a person's not certain, but I really just don't want to read it."

MCNAMARA: That's twenty years ago.

Q: Yes, this is the problem. You're not going to learn; you're not going to absorb experience.

MCNAMARA: It was obviously a terrible emotional crisis for many Americans. There are people who really can't be objective about Vietnam. They can't talk about it, they can't think about it objectively, even now, some fifteen or twenty years later.

Q: You belonged to East Asian Affairs when you came back, is that right?

MCNAMARA: Yes, I did. They still had a Vietnam task force, so I went and sat around there for a while and finished writing my efficiency reports. Some of the people who came out of Can Tho were still in Guam taking care of people. Others were back in the United States by this time. Those in Washington stayed together pretty much.

The whole exercise was very controversial. Suddenly, the State Department also was in great disarray. They were suddenly stuck with large numbers of personnel coming back from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. What were they to do with the sudden influx? The system was overwhelmed.

Q: One further question. When you came back (I hate to ask this question, because I pretty well know the answer), did anyone try to say, "Okay, Terry, here you were, you were running this operation down in southern Vietnam. What were the strong points? What were the weak points?" In other words, basically a solid debriefing?

MCNAMARA: Oh, no. Nobody asked any of those kinds of questions. No.

Q: I'm doing it now.

MCNAMARA: No, there were no questions asked at all. They would have been very happy if I'd just gone away.

Q: Did you find people avoiding you in the corridors of the State Department?

MCNAMARA: Not so much me, but I'm sure that they avoided people, like Graham Martin. He was a pariah.

I wasn't given the warmest of welcomes, I suppose, but there were a lot of people who appreciated what I'd done in taking people out down the river. That was a sort of romantic, dramatic thing, and so I had lots of people shaking my hand and congratulating me on the fact that I'd gotten out. And that was nice.

But, as an institution, there was no effort to debrief me or to find out what happened or what we might have done differently. They didn't want to know about it. And then, of course, they were overwhelmed with all these people coming back. Plus there were the problems of the mass of refugees. At another level, which I'm not really qualified to talk about because I wasn't involved in it, people were scurrying for political cover, at the Henry Kissinger level and the presidential level. That was where Graham Martin, of course, was dealing. I saw Martin in Washington. He was still sick but defiant when he talked to me. He refused to go away quietly until he had been vindicated. I think he was trying to force the administration to nominate him for another job, even though he knew he could not get Senate confirmation. For the administration, of course, he was an embarrassment that they had hoped to use as a scape goat.

I stayed around Washington for a while, trying to sort myself and things out. But then I came to the conclusion that I was wasting my time. So I went home to see my mother.

I had sent people from Vietnam to my family, to sponsor: some to my brother in Ohio, some to my mother, and some to an aunt in Florida. This was before they set up the official sponsoring system. I did this on my own. When these people arrived, I had to sort out their problems. My relatives were a little shocked when suddenly a family of Vietnamese arrived to stay with them. I went to see my mother in Troy, New York. I'd stopped at my brother's house on the way. He was okay. He was willing to take in people, but those destined to stay with him found other alternatives more attractive.

My present wife, three of her sisters and a brother came to my mother's house and stayed for about two weeks. They then went off to France to join older sisters and a brother who were long settled in Paris and Grenoble.

My maid's family was supposed to go to my aunt's in Florida. She was going to employ the maid and take care of her children. But when I was at Camp Pendleton, my maid's sister from Canada called her and told her that unless I could guarantee that I would take care of her for the rest of her life, she should come to Canada. When asked for such a guarantee, I encouraged her to go to Canada. Clearly, I could give no one such a guarantee. So she went to Canada. But, later on, she had a falling out with her sister. I then got her out of Canada, and she came back down here. She worked for Fred Brown until he got married. His new bride didn't want a live-in maid with several children around the house. Fred found the lady a job at a restaurant and financed a house for her. She's still here in Washington. Indeed, I just went to her son's wedding. Her family is all fine. Fred has continued to help them, as needed.

Anyway, I went home and tried to sort out such problems. Once they were solved, I went on a camping trip. I had an old Jeep that I had gotten in Dahomey from the Peace Corps. I was going to go across the Sahara in it. The trip was canceled when I suddenly got orders to go to Vietnam. The Jeep got sent back to my mother's house. I drove around the Adirondacks and the Green Mountains in my Jeep, with a Vietnamese girlfriend.

After some 2-3 weeks, I drove to Washington, stopping in Newport, Rhode Island. I had sent two orphans to a friend there who wanted to adopt children. I got them out at the last minute in one of the infant-evacuation flights. When they left me, I made the boy, who was a little older than the girl, promise that he would stay with the girl, never leave her side, and take care of her. I pinned notes, identifying them, to their clothing. All this was lost. Nonetheless, the boy never left the girl. When their flight left Saigon, I warned my Newport friend that they were on the way. She and her husband found out somehow or other that some of them had arrived in Philadelphia. They went to Philadelphia to search. There was great confusion. No one could give them any information. Finally, they appealed to Senator Pell from Rhode Island. His intervention led to their finding the kids whom they took home. I wanted to see the outcome of my efforts at running a private adoption scheme. When I got to Newport, I found all well with my orphans learning to swim in my friend's back yard pool. Evidently, all was well.

I continued on my way to Washington.

Q: This was what, July, August?

MCNAMARA: This was probably sometime in July. Shortly after arriving I went to see a friend, John Loughran, who was the country director for West Africa. It was he who had intervened with Graham Martin on my behalf and my assignment to Can Tho was the result. John gave me some disturbing news. He said that Dean Brown, then in charge of a special Vietnamese refugee task force, told him that I was in bad odor in the Department. He suggested I call Brown to give him my version of what had happened in Vietnam. Brown told me that he'd heard that I had evacuated people against orders, and that I had been hiding in the Pacific, not wanting to come back to Washington because I was afraid to "face the music." "The best thing you can do now is to help resettle the refugees." I told him that none of the above was true. I had permission to evacuate Vietnamese. I had not been hiding and had nothing to fear as regards my conduct during the evacuation. I explained that I was neither traumatized, nor guilt-ridden by my experience. Brown seemed neither convinced, nor pleased by what I had told him. I strongly suspect that the source of his misinformation was the CIA where he has long enjoyed close relationships.

For a short time, I wandered the halls of the State Department. Then I did go to work for the task force, resettling people. (Brown was gone from the task force by this time.) Ultimately, I became the associate director for operations. I helped close some of the camps, especially the one at Pendleton. I went out to Pendleton and helped Nick Thorne close the camp. I was given orders to get it closed, so we went out and got it closed.

Some of the young Vietnamese students decided that they weren't going to leave the camp unless they got absolute guarantees of full four-year scholarships. These were some of the boys who had dodged the draft by hanging around the university in Saigon for many years. We had scholarships for them in community colleges and some less well known four year institutions. They expected Harvard and Yale. This wasn't possible. Finally, I had to tell them that, "We're closing the camp. Either you go to the colleges we found for you, or you go out on the streets. One or the other." I had a company of Marines standing by. "Those are the trucks that will take you to the airport. You will then board aircraft for the destination where your schools are located. Those who refuse to board the truck for the airport will be taken in another truck to the camp's main gate where they will be dropped off to fend for themselves. You cannot stay here. This camp is closed. The Marines will assist you to board the truck for the airport. They will assure that those who did not wish to go to the airport will board the truck for the main gate. The choice is yours." All opted for the airport and college. Sadly, we had to get tough with these last few recalcitrants. Most of them were the spoiled offspring of the Vietnamese elite. Life had been too easy for them in Saigon. Finally, they had to be made to face reality.

Q: Of course, you did.

MCNAMARA: We couldn't keep them at Camp Pendleton, and we couldn't get them scholarships to Harvard.

Q: We didn't want to develop a Palestine-refugee-type situation in the States.

MCNAMARA: The American people had been incredibly generous. Most refugees appreciated what had been done for them. It was only a small minority that caused problems. They were used so enjoying privileges in their own society. Before leaving Washington I'd gone to see Phil Habib, the assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs. We had been friends for several years. He called the Deputy Director General on my behalf. Phil told me that he had no good jobs available to give me. But he then called the Deputy Director General asking him to give me special consideration. With Phil's urging the Deputy Director General set a time for me to see him. Later that day, he assured me that he would find me an appropriate assignment. "Just have patience," he asked. I heard later that he made inquiries as to my suitability for a DCM-ship. My first option for my next assignment was an ambassadorship. Martin had recommended that I get an embassy. But his recommendations were not worth much at this point. I concluded that my chances of getting my own embassy were not bright. I then scaled down my ambitions to a principal officership in a Consulate General with substantive responsibilities. Bob Miller, who was then Deputy Assistant Secretary in the East Asian Bureau told me that I had been mentioned as a candidate to go to Laos as the chargé d'affaires. Someone else opposed my nomination because I have five children and had just come out of Vietnam. Instead, Tom Corcoran was sent to Laos. He had been vegetating in Quebec which he hated. He'd spent his whole life in Indochina. That's where he really wanted to be. He was rescued from Quebec and sent to Laos. I was then sent to replace him as Consul General in Quebec.

Q: You were in Quebec from when to when?

MCNAMARA: I arrived in Quebec on November 2, 1975. I stayed until July 1979, almost four years.

Q: What was the political situation in Quebec during that period?

MCNAMARA: It was tense. The Quebec separatist movement had been growing stronger over the years.

In the early 1970s, there had been some violent incidents in Montreal-bombs exploded, and separatist extremists kidnapped the British trade commissioner and the labor minister of the Quebec government. The labor minister was killed. Trudeau, the Canadian prime minister at the time, declared a state of siege sending troops on door to door searches in Montreal. The British trade commissioner was recovered unharmed. Nonetheless, the Québécois were shocked by the violence. Thereafter, no separatist party had any chance of winning substantial support unless it firmly disavowed violence.

For a time, the separatist movement in Quebec was cooled down. But, gradually, it took on new life as René Levesque introduced more moderate concepts of a peaceful evolution towards something he described as sovereignty-association. The extremists were in eclipse. Moderates, led by Levesque, dominated the separatist movement. They wanted separation, but they didn't want violence. They wanted to do it in an orderly, legal way.

Their chosen formula was Separation with Association (Séparation et Association). What they were talking about was political separation from, but economic association with, the rest of Canada. And this became relatively popular, certainly among the younger-generation Québécois. It suggested that you could have your cake and eat it too.

The Québécois are a very cautious people. They've survived culturally not by being audacious, but by being prudent. They fear the economic consequences of separation. In their hearts, most of them wanted political sovereignty. But they were afraid of the consequences. And so they were being characteristically prudent. The Parti Québécois had their hearts, but not for immediate political separation.

Nonetheless, the movement was growing stronger as a younger generation in Quebec gained increasing self-confidence.

In prior times, Québécois society had been a theocracy. It was a closed society centered on the church. In late 1950 and early 1960's a "quiet revolution," took place in Québécois society. It came to full flower during the prime ministership of Jean Lesage. Suddenly, the churches were empty and a semi-feudal society turned to social democracy. The French-speaking majority in Quebec were no longer willing to accept the second class status that was thrust upon them after the defeat of the French on the Plains of Abraham.

Q: For example, they've got the lowest birthrate in the world, practically.

MCNAMARA: Well, now. The churches were empty. You'd go into a Catholic church in Quebec, by the time I got there, and you'd see a few old ladies, thumbing their beads. There were very few young people in the churches.

They flipped, in the space of ten or fifteen years, from a virtual theocracy to a modern lay society.

Q: By the time you'd arrived there, this tranquil revolution had already happened?

MCNAMARA: Yes, it had. The social aspects had taken place. Economic and political change were still evolving within the context of the Canadian confederation. The party that was in power in Quebec Province was the Liberal Party, and they were committed to confederation with the rest of Canada, but with some modifications. They wanted changes, while retaining the political unity of Canada. The Parti Québécois was for political separation of Quebec from the rest of Canada.

Q: When you went there, this was a sensitive time.

MCNAMARA: Nobody in Washington recognized it as a sensitive time.

Q: Were there any instructions to play it cool, which I would imagine would be the policy? Don't butt in?

MCNAMARA: No. I was told, by the deputy assistant secretary in EUR who was in charge of Canadian affairs, that separation wasn't serious. "Don't worry about it. It's not going anywhere. The separatists are never going to be strong enough to really challenge Canadian unity. It's a tempest in a teapot."

About a month after I arrived in Quebec, I came to the contrary conclusion that, separatism was quite serious, and growing stronger. I began to consider that political unity of Canada could be challenged in the next few years. Should we not begin quietly to consider the possible implication for America? After all, the political cohesion is certainly a matter of considerable interest to the United States. A profound change in our nearest neighbor must affect us in many ways.

So I wrote a long letter to the man who had told me that it wasn't serious (Dick Vine, who was ambassador to Switzerland afterwards, a very nice man), analyzing the situation as I saw it in Quebec and in Canada. I suggested that the Parti Québécois could win the next election, which we expected to come within the year. Should we not quietly prepare ourselves for such a possibility by discreetly studying the implications of such a possibility? We should not allow ourselves to be surprised by a crisis. Far better to think through the problem now when all is calm rather than reacting to a perceived crisis. In any case, contingency planning could do no harm. I suggested that I come to Washington to discuss the possibility of forming a discreet study group. Vine reluctantly allowed me to come to Washington. We had some inconclusive discussions. His opinion was firmly fixed. Separatism had no long-term future. Vine feared that the fact that we were studying it could become public causing us problems with Ottawa.

Q: How about with the ambassador? Who was the ambassador at the time?

MCNAMARA: The ambassador, when I got there, was William Porter, one of the really great people in the Foreign Service. He left shortly after for Saudi Arabia. Tom Enders was named to replace him. I wrote a briefing paper for Enders, informing him of the growth of separatist political strength and of the potential danger I perceived. Enders took my warning very seriously. He came to agree with me, and we were reasonably well prepared when the Parti Québécois did get elected. During the campaign I was able to predict that the Parti Québécois would win a majority.

Q: I would think something like this would be a sensitive as, say, dealing with Israel. In the normal course of events, you can talk about, "Well, we're ready in case there's a problem in such and such." But with Canada being so close, if we talked about Canada splitting, and it got into the hands of the press, which would treat it maybe just as, "Isn't this interesting?" it would blow up all over the place in Canada.

MCNAMARA: That's the danger. And Vine was right in being cautious. But it seemed to me that four or five of us could get together once in a while-the country director, Vine, me, and one or two others who dealt with Canada-and think through possible contingencies. I never suggested anything large, certainly no one from outside EUR and the Canadian desk. That's why I wrote him a letter rather than putting it in a telegram. I knew how sensitive it could be, and I wrote him a personal, secret letter, which got no distribution at all.

Q: I might add, for the historian who's going into these records, that this is the sort of thing that happens because you know that things are distributed and that there's no way of really sitting on it once you launch it. The only real way of controlling it is to put it in something that may never surface ever.

MCNAMARA: If I did not have a copy myself, nobody might ever see a copy of my letter. I have no idea what Vine did with his copy. Eventually, he may have destroyed it.

Anyway, when Enders became the ambassador, things changed. He agreed with me. He saw the danger. He saw this as a potential problem. We were not caught intellectually unprepared when the Parti Québécois won the election in 1976.

After the Parti Québécois victory my job was very delicate. It was like being a member of the family at a family dispute, like an uncle when a father and son were involved in an argument. If you sided with one or the other, the one that you didn't side with was going to be your enemy. And if you didn't side with either one, you had trouble with both. It was extraordinarily delicate.

Q: Were you finding people trying to recruit you?

MCNAMARA: Oh, yes, all the time. It went on for four years. It was like walking on eggs all the time. But that's what diplomats are trained to do (or should be).

Q: What about our consulate general in Montreal? You were at really the political center, but Montreal was sort of the commercial center. What was the relation there? The people there, were they agreeing with you?

MCNAMARA: Montreal has half the population of Quebec Province. Many of the most rabid separatists lived in Montreal. The real center of the nationalist movement is in the city. It's not out in the boonies. The young, well-educated Québécois are there, the professional class that had been created during this quiet revolution.

Well, my relations with B.J. Harper, whom you know...

Q: Who is basically a visa expert.

MCNAMARA: That's right. She was sensitive about being left out of the main political reporting and analysis activities. Enders decided that I would be responsible for politics in the whole province. That meant going to Montreal and talking to people. I insisted on that. I said, "If you're going to give me the responsibility, you also have to give me access." So he told her that I had to be able to go to Montreal, that I was responsible for politics throughout the province, and that she should work with me. At the same time, her Consulate General would be responsible for economics and the bulk of consular work. B.J. was a very senior consular officer. Her Consulate General was large and important. She was jealous about her turf, but she took Enders decision gracefully. On a personal level we got on very well. She wasn't entirely happy with the arrangement, but she accepted it. I used to go to Montreal regularly and talk to politicians, and she would help me set up meetings. At the same time, she did some ad hoc reporting of value. That was great. I would suggest things that she do, and she would suggest things to me. No, our relationship was pretty good. I was surprised it was as good as it was.

Q: In Quebec, did you find, as in France, a powerful intellectual class that sort of had almost a life separate from the real world? Or was this different from the French system?

MCNAMARA: Well, the Québécois are not French. They're North Americans who happen to speak French. A lot of people mistakenly think of the Québécois as Frenchmen who live in North America. The French themselves are especially prone to making this error of judgement. They really don't understand the Québécois. Nonetheless, there is an elite in Quebec that is very French-ified. No doubt they encourage this misunderstanding. The French are misled because their contacts are mainly among members of the elite. There are people who are incredibly articulate and well educated. A lot of them have studied in France. Many really are French who live in North America. But the bulk of the Québécois are not that at all. They spend their winter vacations, if they can afford it, in Florida. They go to Old Orchard Beach, in Maine, in the summertime. They go to football games and baseball games and hockey. They share few of the continental French interests. Moreover, they love America. It is overwhelmingly their favorite foreign country. This is not necessarily true of this elite, but it is true of the average Québécois.

Q: How important did you find the elite there?

MCNAMARA: The elite is very important. They provide a leadership for the separatist movement. They are the intellectual leaders of the society-the poets, musicians, writers, etc.

And so, when the election took place...

Q: This was the election of what year?

MCNAMARA: Nineteen seventy-six. Few thought the Parti Québécois would win the election. Everyone, including René Lévesque, the leader of the party, was predicting that they would do well in the election, but that they would not win. However, I toured, talked to a wide range of people. Finally, I concluded that they would win. In the last week or so just before the election, Claude Ryan, the editor of the most respected newspaper in the province changed his mind and forecast a victory for the Parti Québécois.

Anyway, they won the election. People trusted René Lévesque when he said, "We won't take independence without a referendum. We're not going to do anything illegal. We're going to do it within a constitutional context. You will have a chance to vote on separation. And what we want is something along the lines of a continued association with the rest of Canada, in economic terms."

At the same time, Trudeau was saying, "That's not possible. You can't have association. If you break the political links, the economic links will be broken, too. And Quebec will suffer." That was the counter argument.

The outcome of the election was based, to a large extent, on trust in Levesque. People believed that he wouldn't go for separation without a referendum. Therefore, they were able to vote Parti Québécois without risk. Even though many had reservations, they voted for the Parti Québécois, because they wanted change. They were voting their hearts at this point.

The Parti Québécois came in with a government that was incredible. It was the best-educated government I've ever seen or heard of in any country that I know of, including France. It was full of Ph.D.s and people who were the cream of the Québécois elite.

René Levesque was a great character, a marvelous little man. He'd been a journalist, and he'd become a folk hero in Quebec as a result of his radio and TV programs. He chain-smoked, and was about five foot four. He bustled around in rumpled suits. Nonetheless, he was a very complex character. On a personal level, he was decent. The people instinctively trusted him. He provided a degree of leadership that they hadn't had before.

Quebec already had many of the trappings of independence when the Parti Québécois came to power. The province had its own foreign service, for instance. The Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs was run like a foreign ministry, and I was treated like an ambassador. I mean, it was incredible. Enders used to come over. He was treated like a usurper in a friendly way. It was very funny, the whole thing. Levesque really did not like Tom. Part of it may have been his height. Another factor was his arrogant demeanor. In his well cut suits and polished manner he may have personified an Anglo elite for Levesque.

From the outset, the Parti Québécois wanted to get along with the Americans. They wanted to convince us that they weren't going to do something foolish, that they weren't going to hurt the interests of the United States. And they went out of their way to make this clear to me. I was taken into their confidence, especially by Claude Moran, who was their effective foreign minister (he was called the minister of intergovernmental affairs, but, in fact, he acted like a foreign minister), and by Levesque himself. They told me what they were up to, what they wanted to do, how they were going to do it, in some detail, more than you would expect. However, this insider information was not really necessary in analyzing their politics. Their government was open, almost transparent, to anyone who took the trouble to understand them. The society is tribal with a mob of personal relationships that virtually ruled out secrecy.

Q: Were they asking you, "What is the reaction of the United States to what we're planning?"

MCNAMARA: Sometimes they would; sometimes they wouldn't. They just wanted to make it absolutely clear to me what was going on.

Q: Did we have a policy?

MCNAMARA: Our policy was that we would prefer to see Canada remain united, but it was a decision that the Canadians themselves had to take. No one was completely satisfied with this formula. Our expression of preference for a united Canada was enough to minimally satisfy Ottawa. The Québécois were pleased by the formulas equivocation.

A recent book entitled *The Eye of the Eagle*, written by a Québécois journalist, described the triangular relationship between America, Quebec and Canada during this period. Reading it confirms the degree of attention focused on American attitudes and actions by the Québécois. Finally, the referendum on sovereignty-association was held and lost. The electorate turned around and gave the Parti Québécois another electoral victory. Their ambivalence could not have been clearer.

Now, they may come back. In the next election, they may well be elected.

During the whole period that the Parti Québécois government was in power when I was there, I was convinced that they couldn't win a referendum. Canada was, at that point, in an economic recession, and I was convinced that there was no way, in those times, that a majority of the Québécois, who were very prudent, as I said before, would vote for something as audacious as political separatism. They weren't about to launch themselves into the unknown, under those circumstances. And so I was convinced that they couldn't win a referendum, no matter what they did, at that point. In the longer-term future, it might be possible, but at that point in history, it was not.

I went on paper saying that, on a number of occasions. Enders agreed with me, and we worked very well together. In fact, he got rid of most of the principal officers in Canada while he was there. He couldn't get rid of B.J. in Montreal, and he didn't get rid of me.

Anyway, that was that. I left in 1979. The referendum hadn't been held yet, but it looked as though they were going to hold it within the next year. Before leaving I wrote a long piece predicting that the referendum would be held and defeated. However, I also warned that separatism would not end.

Q: In '79, what did you do and where did you go?

MCNAMARA: I got a telegram from the director general, saying that I had been selected for the Senior Seminar, and that I couldn't get out of it. That was that. I was going to the Senior Seminar, and there was no way of breaking that assignment. I'd already been to the Naval War College, so I couldn't figure what the hell; did I really need that much more training? But, anyway, other people got the same message; it wasn't just me. They just selected people and forced them to go. I don't know why, but they did.

So I went to the Senior Seminar. It was a delightful sabbatical year. We did trips to each one of the major geographic areas in the United States. It was to reacquaint senior Foreign Service officers with life in America and the things that were going on here-political things, social things, economic, cultural. We went to Boston, where I argued with some bankers about buying electricity from Quebec. They had their money tied up in that disastrous atomic reactor in New Hampshire. They did not want to hear about cheap, plentiful hydro power from Quebec.

Q: Yankee something or other?

MCNAMARA: Something like that.

Q: They're still fighting that thing.

MCNAMARA: Yes, it was such a stupid idea. They had so much clean hydroelectricity on their doorstep. No investment was needed, just enough to finance transmission lines. One of the bankers said to me, "But it's not American."

And I said, "What do you mean, 'It's not American?' Do you mean to suggest that the Canadians are going to go to war with us, or that the Qui $\frac{1}{2}$ becois will deny us the electricity? What the hell would they do with it? They can't sell it to anybody else." This was Howdy Dowdy stuff. But obviously they were looking out for their own economic interests.

We visited San Francisco; we went to Los Angeles; we went to Denver. We went into mines in Denver; we went to Albuquerque, in New Mexico; we went to New Orleans; we went to Florida; we went to Puerto Rico; we went to Georgia; we went to North Carolina.

The high points for me, of the several trips, were Chicago and Nebraska. We got to ride around in Chicago, at night, in a police car. Each class member was assigned to a patrol car to go out at night on a regular patrol with the police. I was in one of those public-housing neighborhoods. In the middle of the night, I found myself running up alleyways, with two policemen with drawn guns. Holy Jesus, I thought I was back in Vietnam. That was an extraordinary experience. One read of such things, but most of us never experience them. I had a far better understanding and sympathy for the cops on the beat.

On another trip, I got to stay on a farm in Nebraska, one of these big corn farms. I ran a combine and helped the farmer with his chores. I stayed with the farmer and his wife for a couple of days. I had no previous idea about life on a farm. It was eye opening.

The whole experience seeing America was just great. The Senior Seminar, as it was run then, was super.

Another feature of the seminar was a major study of an approved problem. We had about six or eight weeks to do research and produce a report. The seminar provided a budget to finance the study. I went to southern Africa to study railways and ports as political instruments in the hands of the South Africans. I visited South Africa, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Zambia. My visit to Zimbabwe came just after the election that ended Rhodesia and brought about black rule in Zimbabwe. When I was there power hadn't yet been turned over to the new government. A tense time. I did not go to Tanzania as I had spent some three years there in the not too distant past. In fact, I knew all of the countries I was dealing with.

On the basis of my visits and research I wrote a paper. That was reasonably well received. I concluded, however, with a dire prediction of inevitable racial conflict. My only solution was a partition of South Africa into black and white dominated parts. Thank God my crystal ball was clouded.

Q: You got out of there when?

MCNAMARA: I graduated in 1980.

Q: And then what?

MCNAMARA: Well, that's when I had problems as a result of Vietnam. It was the Carter administration, and I was told, very confidentially, by the head of Senior Assignments that I was being blackballed by the assistant secretary for the Far East and by the assistant secretary for Africa. I couldn't be assigned in either area, as long as these gentlemen were in charge of their bureaus. Dick Moose was the Africa Assistant Secretary and Holbrooke was Assistant Secretary for East Asia.

Q: These were two dissidents from Vietnam.

MCNAMARA: That's right.

Q: Who had left the Foreign Service over Vietnam. So anybody connected with it, who had hung on to the very end, was not a...

MCNAMARA: Well, I could never figure out what it was all about. I didn't make policy towards Vietnam. I didn't even agree with our being there in large numbers. I was just an instrument of policy, so I couldn't quite understand why me. But, anyway, that's the way it was. It was a little bit like the old days of the old China hands being treated like traitors for having done their jobs. The director general, Harry Barnes, reluctantly confirmed to me my status of pariah. He didn't like to have to confirm it, but he did. He didn't come right out and say it, but when he came over to the seminar and I asked him about it, he said, "Well, yeah, I guess." He was a little nervous. Obviously he would be. He knew that it was happening, but I guess there was nothing he could do about it, or nothing he was prepared to do about it. Obviously, our directors general are not full of courage. He should have stood up to them, and tried to protect the professional Foreign Service. But he didn't, and that's that.

Anyway, I came to the end of the seminar without an assignment. They were looking for an assignment for me, but when the two bureaus in which I had the most credentials were barred to me, obviously it was difficult to find a suitable assignment.

So I hung around into August before I got word from Personnel, that I was to have an interview with Pat Derian, for the post of Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Human Rights. She had the reputation of being an idiosyncratic liberal. I went for the interview with her, feeling that I was wasting my time. Surprisingly, we got on very well. Nonetheless, she advised me that she could not hire me. "It would ruin your career as a Foreign Service officer. I need somebody who will go out and scream and holler and join demonstrations. You could not do such things and survive. I would like to have you, but I know it would not work to your interest."

That night, however, she spoke to her husband, Hodding Carter, on my behalf. He also needed a deputy assistant secretary for the Public Affairs Bureau. With this unusual recommendation, I became a deputy assistant secretary for public affairs. A little off the wall, but that's the way it happened. Unfortunately, Hodding left immediately; resigning with Vance over the attempt to rescue the hostages in Iran. But I was there, I had the job, and I was in public affairs for almost two years.

Q: What were your particular responsibilities?

MCNAMARA: I ran most of the non-press part of it. Being spokesman consumed the assistant secretary. Those press briefings at noontime, it's like putting your head in the lion's mouth every day. It takes all morning long, from about seven until noon, to be briefed on what's going on and what questions you're going to be asked that day. And so the assistant secretary had no time to run the rest of a large bureau. So I ran most of the bureau.

It's a big operation.

Q: Speeches and things like that.

MCNAMARA: Speeches, trips, whatever. If the Secretary of State goes someplace or other, we make all the arrangements. We did the advancing; we made all the arrangements for that. We also had a speakers' bureau that arranges speakers for various places. We also published a variety of publications; made videos, TV programs, radio programs, spots, all sorts of things. We also had a section that did public-opinion polling. We didn't do the polling itself, but we did the analyzing of polls, and provided this information to the principals in the State Department. Also, we used it to develop our own public-affairs campaigns, to target audiences and that sort of thing. We also had a section that answered all the mail for the President and for the Secretary of State, on foreign affairs. We'd pick out the issues of the day, and put together canned responses. Then we'd take each letter and use our prepared responses, to form a coherent letter. The letters were signed by a machine for the President or the Secretary of State. It couldn't work any other way; there are thousands of pieces of mail that come in to the White House and the State Department. If the President were to answer every piece, why, you know, it couldn't be done.

Also, I was the chairman of the appeals board for freedom of information. The principal deputy assistant secretary from each one of the substantive bureaus was a member, and I was the chairman. That was another one of my duties.

Then we discovered it was the State Department's bicentennial. And so we wrote a memo to the Secretary of State proposing that a program be put together to celebrate the Department's bicentennial. He said, "Right. You're the chairman." So I had to put together a year-long program to celebrate the bicentennial. This was great fun. We did it with our own little staff from PA. We got some help from elsewhere on an ad hoc basis, but really we did most of the programming ourselves. We had the best party that was ever thrown on the 8th floor, to celebrate the 100th birthday of the State Department. The fire marshal limited the numbers we could invite. (I think it was seven hundred.) Therefore, we had to restrict the number of invitations. My assistants and I concluded that the only democratic way to do it was by "lot" so each bureau in the State Department got so many tickets with instruction to organize their own lottery. Everyone in the bureau would pull a number out of a hat. In some instances, the cleaning lady got to come and the deputy assistant secretary didn't get an invitation. It was the only equitable way to do it. We had an enormous birthday cake. I had a squad of Marines from the MSG school at Quantico carry it. The President refused our invitation. It was just before Carter was to leave office. I induced Secretary Muskie to twist Vice-President Mondale's arm. Mondale graciously came and cut our cake with a sword. The party was a great success.

Q: Well, let me ask you a question that's pertinent to the program I'm in. How did you find the historian's office, which was part of your bailiwick? What was your impression of their operation?

MCNAMARA: It was very troubled at that time. The historians and the historical community in the United States were not happy, because they felt that the Foreign Relations series was being censored, that they weren't being allowed to put in all of the documentation that should have been put in those volumes. The director of the historian's office, who worked directly for me, a guy named Trask, was caught between his own subordinates-the historians in the historian's office and the lay historians-and his superiors in the State Department. The hierarchy in the State Department wanted to limit inclusion. They didn't want widespread declassification. They were not very high on declassification, some of them. I was also caught in the middle. I was the advocate for the historians, and I got Bill Dyess, who was at this point the assistant secretary of state, to arrange a meeting with David Newsom.

Q: Who was secretary for political affairs.

MCNAMARA: To try to get some understanding for Trask's position. Newsom danced around the subject, but obviously would make no commitments. Later, I was called to Ben Read's office. He was the under secretary for management. A nasty, scheming man.

Q: It wasn't Kennedy at that time?

MCNAMARA: Oh, no. He came later. Anyway, they didn't want to say that they were against declassification, but at the same time, they did everything that they could to hinder it. They were paying lip service to it, and I was fooled by a lot of this, until finally Sam, (oddly enough, he now works for the American Historical Society)... He was Read's staff assistant. ...and I were supposed to work together to try to sort out some of the problems with the historians. Finally, Sam told me, privately and quietly, "You know that this is all just window dressing, the under secretary doesn't want these documents to come out." That was a revelation to me. I was terribly naive, and thought that they were seriously trying to find a reasonable solution. They weren't trying to find a solution. They'd already found their solution. They wanted to sit on the historians but feared open dissent. They did not want newspaper attention, but they also didn't want documents that they considered sensitive coming out in the Foreign Relations series.

Eventually efficiency-report-writing time came around. I had to write Trask's efficiency report. By this point, it was perfectly obvious that Trask really couldn't stay in the historian's office. He was going to have a mutiny, not just because of the question of declassification, but also because of his autocratic management style. Dyess was really down on Trask; he wanted to get rid of him. He was also reflecting the views of Read.

I felt that Trask was being done an injustice. I wanted to save him, but I wasn't quite sure how. By chance, I found out that the historian's office in the Army was looking for a chief historian. I wrote a letter to the historian of the Army (a major general), and told him what a great historian Trask was. At the same time I suggested to Trask that he apply for the job. Fortunately, the general took my recommendation seriously and hired Trask who was a highly respected historian.

Q: He's written a major book on the Spanish-American War, for example.

MCNAMARA: I guess.

Q: I've read it.

MCNAMARA: I don't think he had written it at that point, but he'd done a lot of others. He's a major authority on military history.

Then I gave him an efficiency report that pleased both Trask and Dyess. It was a solomonic feat.

Q: This is diplomacy.

MCNAMARA: I'm still not sure how I did it. Dyess was overjoyed. He said, "You got it just right." And Trask was happy with it. He said, "It's absolutely fair. Thank you very much." I felt like Solomon. Trask got the job in the Army and went off happily.

But Slany, who is there still, was given the job as historian. He is a much more diplomatic figure and gets on better with the troops, as well as with the hierarchy. Sadly, I've heard some rumbling more recently that he too is in trouble.

Q: He's had lots of trouble with his troops. I think it's the nature of the business.

MCNAMARA: I don't see how you could have that job without getting in trouble. All I can say is, I was very happy to get Trask out of there without it hurting him. He got a job that he was better suited to. He became the professional historian in the Department of the Army. A major general did the heavy managerial work.

Q: Were there any other major areas of problems there?

MCNAMARA: Well, obviously, the biggest problem was the problems of the spokesman. But I didn't have anything to do with that. My part of the thing was running well.

Q: There was a change of administration in '81.

MCNAMARA: Right. Dean Fischer came in as the new assistant secretary. I had known Dean in East Africa. He'd been the Time-Life correspondent in Nairobi when I was in Dar es Salaam. We were friends. When he came in, he asked me to stay.

At that point, I'd already been approached by Andy Steigman with the possibility of going to Gabon as ambassador.

Q: Moose had now left.

MCNAMARA: Yes, Moose was gone. There was a new administration, and they were working on the premise that the enemy of my enemy is my friend. I was no more their friend than the man in the moon, but since I had been blackballed by the old administration, I was a golden boy in their eyes.

At this point, Andy Steigman, who is a friend of mine, was the deputy director of personnel.

Q: And an African hand.

MCNAMARA: And an old friend of mine. He knew I had suffered an injustice, and so he thought of me in terms of Gabon. He had been ambassador to Gabon earlier, and thought that I would be good for the job. He proposed me, and my nomination just slid through.

Q: You went to Gabon as ambassador from when to when?

MCNAMARA: I went at the end of 1981, and I left in the summer of 1984.

Q: What were American interests there at that time?

MCNAMARA: Minimal. We did have some economic interests. Gabon is a relatively wealthy country. By African standards, very wealthy. Their per capita income is the highest in Africa, aside from Libya. It's higher than South Africa. They have a small population, and they are a major oil producer in Africa. So the country is well off. There were some American oil companies that had interests in getting into the oil-production business in Gabon. There was also some American interest in the mining. And then there were some very big contracts being let. Bongo, the president, was building a railway right across the country, a major railway construction, through a tropical rain forest, costing an enormous amount of money.

Q: Where was the railroad going?

MCNAMARA: It was going from the port at Libreville [Owendo] to the southeastern corner of the country, where Bongo came from, a place called Franceville.

Q: This was more a personal thing.

MCNAMARA: Well, it was a personal monument, but also he was talking about it as if it were going to open up the country to wider economic development, cutting an axis through the center of the country. I never thought it was very realistic. Moreover, it was being done at enormous expense. It wasn't worth what they were spending. But, still, it was better than just sticking the money in Swiss bank accounts, although God knows there was enough of that going on, too.

Anyway, the American interests were (1) our oil companies getting decent concessions, and (2) the possibility of getting contracts in terms of the major construction projects that were going on. Those were our two major interests.

Q: Was there any East-West, Soviet versus the United States problem there?

MCNAMARA: Not really. Bongo was and is a creature of the French. The French, obviously, would see that the Soviets would not get out of hand. There was a Russian embassy and a Chinese embassy and a North Korean embassy, but there was no imminent danger of anything like that happening as long as Bongo retained power. Should he lose power and somehow or other some radical young men take over, well, it's possible. It happened in other French-African countries. But as long as he held on to power (and at that point, there seemed to be no credible threat), why, there wasn't any real possibility. The French were certainly going to do their best to assure that he remained in power.

Q: What was the political situation in Gabon?

MCNAMARA: Opposition to Bongo came mainly from the Fang, the country's largest tribe. They're located mainly in the northern part of the country where it overlaps into the Cameroons and Equatorial Guinea. In fact, it's the tribe of the present president in the Cameroons, and is the dominant tribe in Equatorial Guinea. They're a very aggressive people, a tribe that's very cohesive and aggressive. They look out for themselves and for each other. They have a feeling that they have a natural right to leadership in Gabon. The first president was a Fang.

Bongo comes from a little tribe in the southeastern part of the country, with lines going south into the Congo. It's not a threat to anyone. And that's one of the reasons that, just after independence, when Leon M'ba, the first president died of cancer, the French maneuvered Bongo into a position of taking over the presidency. The non-Fang in the country are all fearful of the Fang, and so one of the things that Bongo has got going for him is that he's not a Fang. He serves as a sort of bulwark against Fang domination.

Also, he shares some wealth with people from various tribal groups. In his system everyone gets a piece of the action. He retains a good hold on power as long as he has enough money to buy off oppositionists as they raised their heads and as long as the French continue their support. The country has some economic problems at present. The price of oil has gone down, and they've overextended themselves financially. Bongo finds it difficult to live within his means in the best of times. But for the first twenty years of his reign, he was able to quiet opposition easily by spreading oil money over any troubled waters.

Q: Did you have any dealings with Bongo?

MCNAMARA: Oh, all the time.

Q: How did you work with him?

MCNAMARA: Well, I worked with him all right. He is a strange little man. I came to like him.

He's built himself an enormous palace of rose marble, with sliding walls and sliding doors and all sorts of things controlled electronically.

When I got there, it was just after the French election of 1981. The Socialists had come to power in France, and Bongo didn't like that. He had supported the conservatives in France, specifically Chirac. Well, Giscard had run, but Chirac was really his man. Bongo was very fearful of a Socialist government. His fears had been intensified by the French ambassador who was a former French intelligence type with strong ties to the Gaullists.

Q: Deuxième Bureau.

MCNAMARA: No, it's not the Deuxième Bureau. It's the DG something or other, Direction Générale something. It's their counterpart to the CIA. But that and this oil company, ELF, and the RPR, the party of Chirac, the neo-Gaullists, are all tied up.

Bongo's been very helpful to the French over the years in mounting various clandestine operations elsewhere in Africa. In some cases, he has provided a launching point. His presidential guard has provided a comfortable R&R facility for mercenaries and other clandestine operations. During the Biafran War, Gabon was the center for the French supply missions going into Biafra. Aircraft flew from both Gabon and Sao Tomé, but particularly Gabon. The French used it as a rear base. The logistics operation was by the French military attaché working out of the French Embassy.

You had to get along with Bongo. He was the leader; he was el supremo in Gabon. If you wanted to have relations with Gabon, you had to deal with him.

When the Socialists came to power in France in 1981, Bongo was fearful that French attitudes towards Gabon and Africa would change. He had been led to believe this by the outgoing French Ambassador, Maurice Robert, a Gaullist with long ties to the French secret service, ELF and the RPR. Indeed, he had been Jacques Foccart's man in the SDECB for many years.

To disturb the new French Socialist government, Bongo courted the newly arrived American ambassador. He would see to it that I got on state controlled television regularly. I was received in his office at least once a week. He would call me asking me to, "Please come. I have something to talk to you about." I'd have to go up and sit around for five or six hours in his outer office while he received a stream of people of all sorts. His attentions did "piss off" the French, as they were intended to do.

Q: Oh, God.

MCNAMARA: Bongo never kept to a schedule. Normally one would sit in his waiting room for four or five hours. I took books with me to read while waiting. There was nothing else to do. He was the president. If you walked out standing on your dignity and so on, he could ruin your mission to Gabon. So you really had to do it; you didn't have any choice.

I sat in his waiting room for long hours, got to see him, and we'd joke and he'd tell me stories and we occasionally talked about serious things. When I had instructions to deliver a demarche, I would try to make the points that the State Department wanted me to make with him. We had no AID operation in Gabon. The per-capita income of the country was way too high. So we didn't have anything to give him. He did want to see the American president. This flattered his ego. He had his kids, a couple of girls, at a university in California, where they were getting into endless trouble and were always a problem. He had a house in Beverly Hills, and his then wife began visits to Beverly Hills for long stays. She had boyfriends, and she was apparently an Olympic-class shopper. She'd go and spend enormous amounts of money on Rodeo Drive. He would call me in and tell me, "You've got to bring her back! Get her out of that country! She is costing me millions!"

I'd say, "But we can't do that. We have laws, you know. She hasn't broken any of them. If she breaks the law, we'll throw her out. But until she does, I can't do anything. Mr. President you should revoke her diplomatic passport. Then she could not stay."

He'd say, "Oh, I can't do that!"

He was afraid of her, and he wanted us to do the dirty work for him. The French had been doing such things for years. There are stories that the French secret service arranged the killing of one of her boyfriends, a Vietnamese with whom she was sleeping. The allegations has caused a long standing scandal. She's had a series of gentlemen friends. Bongo was forever calling me in and telling me I had to do something about his Josephine, and I'd have to tell him there wasn't a goddamned thing I could do about it. "Sorry about that, Mr. President." Anyway, it was kind of amusing.

He's a tiny little man who wears elevated shoes. Frequently he wears capes with his monograph on the bottom like Napoleon Bonaparte had an NB on his cape collar. He'd sit on an elevated throne-like chair in his office, I was seated on an ordinary chair or sofa across from him for our chats.

He was an amusing guy, a nice little man. He wasn't brutal as many African dictators are. He did put people in jail once in a while, but the Gabonese did not practice systematic torture or the systematic abuse of the population. Obviously, he enriched himself and the people around him, but some of the country's riches did trickle down to the population. His was a corrupt regime; there's no question of it. But even though it was corrupt, they did spread money around fairly widely. Of course, a privileged few got a hell of a lot more than others. Bongo got more than anyone else.

Q: When it came to things like UN votes and all, were the French pretty well calling the shots?

MCNAMARA: The French could get pretty much what they wanted from Gabon. Relations were rocky for about a year after the Socialists were elected in 1981. At that point, he was courting us to goad the French; and as insurance against the French should they wish to move against him. He was looking for another protector, if he needed one.

The first French ambassador sent by the new Socialist government was a career guy. He wasn't from a member of the Bande de Gabonais (the Gabonese gang) that included thugs from various intelligence services, the Gaullist Mafia and God knows what else, all of whom enjoyed strong ties to Bongo. This poor man was just a straight foreign-service officer who had the misfortune of being assigned by a Socialist government, which sounded initially as if they really wanted to change relationships with their clients in Francophone Africa. My French colleague lasted for about a year before Bongo got rid of him. The poor man was hardly ever received by Bongo. The French ambassador! He was ignored, taunted in many ways, until finally they pushed him out.

Policy was changed in Paris, because Bongo, Houphouet-Boigny and Diouf, France's traditional African friends, finally got to Mitterrand and told him, "Look, if you want our help on many things, important to you, if you want to continue to have a privileged position, our relationship must be a two-way street. You don't get all of the privileges without being helpful to us, too. And the first thing you've got to do is to change your politics and get rid of Jean-Pierre Cote," who was the minister for cooperation. That's the key ministry for Francophone Africa. The Foreign Ministry is not. Traditionally the Foreign Ministry has little involvement in relations with Francophone Africa. The key ministry is Cooperation. They're the ones who dish out the cash in the form of military and development aid to France's former dependencies in Africa.

Anyway, the Africans got to Mitterrand. And Mitterrand, I think, personally, was looking for an excuse to bring to heel the progressive wing in his own party. Obviously, when the Gaullists first came to power, he couldn't do that. They'd been elected as Socialists, with a certain party platform. But then I think Mitterrand knew that the "third world" approach wouldn't work in Africa. The failure of Socialist African policy was coupled by Mitterrand with the disaster of the early nationalizations in France itself. The idealists were dismissed and Mitterrand reverted to a cynical Gaullist pattern of dealing with African clients on a highly personal basis.

Q: They had to go through that digestion and regurgitation period.

MCNAMARA: That's right, the Socialists really screwed up the French economy. I think Mitterrand anticipated that they were going to screw up the economy, they were going to make awful mistakes. He allowed this to happen so that he could bring them to heel. Part of it was overseas; part of it was domestic. He got rid of Cote, the Minister-delegate for Cooperation within a year. Cote's policies went out the door, and they went right back to the old Gaullist relationships and policies towards Africa.

Q: Did you have to go on TV as much?

MCNAMARA: I wasn't on TV as much after that, no.

The guy they sent out to replace the unfortunate career fellow was a professor of strategy from the Sorbonne. He was also a former colonel in the army, an old parachutist. He was a Gaullist de Gauche, a left-leaning Gaullist, but a Gaullist nonetheless. Here's a Gaullist being sent out by a Socialist government. Even though he's a Gaullist de Gauche, he's still a Gaullist. And a former paratrooper, although on the right side of the problems in Algeria. And a spook. He was also a former spook.

Q: For those who don't know, would you explain what a spook is, in our language.

MCNAMARA: Well, a spook is an intelligence operator. He was certainly one of those, too.

Well, anyway, the relationship with Bongo and the French changed immediately, reverting to the old comfortable arrangements that existed under previous Gaullist governments. The pattern had been set twenty years earlier by Jacques Foccart who was De Gaulle's eminence grise for Francophone Africa, manipulated African governments. In fact it was he who had put Bongo in power.

Q: Were there any real problems we had with Gabon?

MCNAMARA: Not big problems, no. It was mainly, "Can you get Gabon to vote a certain way in the UN on certain issues?" And I would always go to Bongo. I didn't bother with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The minister was Bongo's nephew. Most of the time, he seemed half asleep. Bongo never allowed him to do any serious business. So it was a waste of time to go to the ministry. I was able to see Bongo when I wished. Therefore I rarely went to the ministry. I let my DCM deal with the ministry. Once in a great while, I'd go and see the minister himself, but other than that, I dealt with Bongo leaving the DCM to deal with the ministry on routine matters. That's the way Bongo wanted it. Things got done with Bongo, even though the ministry might be completely against it, as they sometimes were. Relations with the President were excellent. Therefore, our relations with Gabon were trouble free. Often times, personal relations in Africa are far more important than institutional ones. Most Americans find this difficult to get used to.

The only real problems were that our companies had difficulty getting contracts. The French had a lock on all the juicy contracts and concessions. They were able to manipulate things so that they would get them. They had had real influence and power in Gabon. For instance, they had a battalion of paratroopers stationed in Libreville as a personal insurance for Mr. Bongo. There were French "advisors" in every ministry, many of them made the real decisions for lazy or inept Gabonese. They had a compact with Bongo. They needed and used each other. Moreover, money passed hands in both directions. French businessmen paid bribes, something our businessmen can't do by law, so immediately we were at a big disadvantage. In the other direction, Bongo was a major contributor to political party campaign funds in France, Jacques Chirac is a major beneficiary of Bongo largesse. Nonetheless, we did occasionally get some worthwhile scraps.

Bongo had a funny relationship with a shadowy diamond merchant named Maurice Tempelsman. Perhaps, Maurice is best known as Jackie Kennedy Onassis's last boyfriend. He was the guy who supplied the yacht for Clinton's vacation at Martha's Vineyard the year before Jackie died. Maurice is a man of unsavory background. He has long connections with the CIA and with Mobutu. He's a diamond trader, so you can imagine how his business with Mobutu worked. Maurice peddled a lot of the diamonds for Mobutu as well as for Savimbi. His agent in Kinshasa was a guy named Larry Devlin, who was the station chief for many years in Kinshasa and is really the one who put Mobutu into power, and helped keep him there. There are also stories connecting him with Lumumba's death.

Q: What was Tempelsman doing in Gabon?

MCNAMARA: Tempelsman had a special relationship with Bongo. He used to call him his cousin or his brother or sometimes his uncle. Tempelsman was obviously trying to make money from his relationship with Bongo as he had profited from his ties to Mobutu. Finally, he got himself involved with a consortium that was bidding on the construction of a major minerals port in Libreville. Oh, it was a three-,four-hundred-million project. Before I left, he got an agreement signed. I don't think that it was ever built, so I don't think he ever got any money out of it. But he got closer than any other American businessman to big money in Gabon. Maurice got to know Bongo through Mobutu. For years, Maurice had a man stationed in Gabon. A guy who worked for him was there, even though he wasn't doing any business there. Presumably something was going on. They were also tied in with George Jardim, a well known leader of the Portuguese Colons in Mozambique. Jardim ran a small bank in Gabon in which Bongo had an interest. I always suspected CIA may also have had an interest.

I mean there were some funny things, and I really am not sure what, because there was also a man named Georges Jardine there, who ran a small bank in cahoots with Bongo. Georges Jardine was the leader of the settler group in Mozambique, a Portuguese leader, under Salazar. Close connections with Salazar, and leader of the Portuguese settler group in Mozambique. A man well known in Africa, but not very favorably known in African nationalist circles. He was there, too, and he had a funny relationship with Tempelsman's group.

Really, I'm not sure exactly what was going on, but there was something going on. And the CIA was involved in it. I mean, they were not telling me about all the things that they were involved in.

Q: How did you find your staff there?

MCNAMARA: The American staff?

Q: Yes.

MCNAMARA: When I got there, I had a very good DCM, a man named Kevin Maguire, who was very good. Sadly, he only remained seven or eight months after I arrived. But I found a good replacement, Herman Ross, who was a very competent guy. Other than that, we had an economic officer, who wasn't much of an economist. We had a spook as the political officer. When I first got there, we had a very good admin officer, but then the admin officers changed and the quality declined. We had a consular officer, a guy named Chris English. What else was there? There was a USIS guy, who was a dead loss and incompetent. The USIS operation was well set up-presumably by the predecessor of my PAO. We didn't have any AID. But we had a big Peace Corps contingent. Plus, we had the usual Marine contingent. I guess that was it. It was a nice little embassy.

Q: How did you find the Peace Corps?

MCNAMARA: Oh, the volunteers were fine. The volunteers were very good.

Q: Any accomplishments?

MCNAMARA: Oh, I don't know. About as much as they do in most places. But they were nice kids, and they certainly did their best. I can't point to any great accomplishments, but they certainly didn't do anything wrong. No doubt, they had some modest accomplishments.

The director, when I was there, was not worth much. He was a political appointee, a Yugoslavian-American for Reagan in the 1980 campaign. Thus, he tried to give the impression of being influential. Well, I don't know how many Yugoslavian-Americans there are in the United States, but I doubt they form a decisive voting bloc anywhere in the States.

Q: It's not an enormous bloc, and I'm sure it's probably split all over the place.

MCNAMARA: I suspect so.

Q: In those days. Now, there isn't any Yugoslavia.

MCNAMARA: It's hard for me to believe that he had any real political clout. But he had enough to become a Peace Corps director, which doesn't take much. He spoke French, and they needed somebody who spoke French, so it was probably pretty easy for him to get the job. In any case, he was more interested in having a large house and in his social status than he was in running a Peace Corps program. Ultimately, he left Gabon because his wife didn't feel that life as the wife of a Peace Corps director was prestigious enough. She wanted to live the diplomatic life, and that's not the Peace Corps way. The role of a Peace Corps director and his wife should be in keeping with the Peace Corps austere image. My relations with the volunteers was warm and informal. I visited them regularly. I liked them very much.

Otherwise, we had a fairly sizeable Amoco Oil Company group.

Q: This is an oil company.

MCNAMARA: They were drilling offshore and had a good-sized operation going on at that time.

Q: You left there when, Terry?

MCNAMARA: Nineteen eighty-four.

Q: And what was your next assignment?

MCNAMARA: The Department didn't have an assignment for me immediately. I didn't really want to work in the Department itself.

A friend of mine at the Hoover Institution in Stanford suggested that I do a book on France in Black Africa. He said that there was a vacuum in terms of scholarly work on the period from the end of the colonial era to the present. Nobody had really done very much on Francophone Africa during that period, especially the Francophone's African countries relations with France. He suggested that I was well qualified to do something like that.

I agreed. Stanford offered a fellowship at the Hoover Institution. I made arrangements with the State Department so that they would let me go, and pay my salary. Hoover provided an office and stenographic assistance. I didn't really need anything more than that, just an office, a telephone and typing when I needed it.

I spent a year there, doing the basic research for a book. It was a very enjoyable year.

Hoover is a great place. Its ideological orientation is conservative, more conservative than I am. But nobody tried to impose an ideological line on me. Nor do I think any such imposition was made on other scholars. However, conservatives ran the place and their ideological preference was obvious in the selection of senior scholars. Most, but not all, were well to the right of center. They did have an old socialist in residence. Sidney Hook was very well known in leftist circles in New York. My colleagues weren't all Milton Friedmans, although Milton Friedman was there. The dominant thrust was to the right, but they certainly didn't impose anything on Sidney Hook, and they certainly didn't impose anything on me. This is not to suggest that I was in the same league as Hook or Friedman.

There were some others with Foreign Service connections there. A man who wrote a first-class book on Japan had just died.

Q: Probably John Emerson.

MCNAMARA: John Emerson, exactly. He'd been there for several years.

Q: He wrote a book called *The Japanese Thread*, or something like that. It was an excellent book. He was a long-time Japanese..., who also got burned during the McCarthy period.

MCNAMARA: That's right. Kennedy tried to name him ambassador to Tanzania, but he was refused confirmation by the Senate. Sadly, he never became an ambassador. It was a great injustice. But, yes, John Emerson had been there. I knew John when he was consul general in Salisbury (Harare now). When I arrived in Stanford in 1984 he had just died. One of his associates, an old Foreign Service officer, was continuing John's work. In fact, he had an office just down the hall from me. There were a couple of others. Phil Habib had an office there which he never occupied.

Q: You finished there around '85 or so?

MCNAMARA: It was the summer of '85. My fellowship ran out. The Department had no great assignments for me. I hadn't done what most careerists do when they finish an ambassadorship. The bright boys find themselves a job in the State Department where they seek the right connections that will lead to another appointment. I hadn't done that. I had wasted my opportunity, in a career sense. I understood the game when I chose to go to Hoover. Much lip service is paid to intellectual development in the Foreign Service, but little given to those who take themselves out of the careerist race to do something like writing a book.

Suddenly, I got, one day, on my desk, a notice that they were looking for a volunteer to go as DCM to Lebanon. So I thought, "Well, gee, that's interesting. I've never been to Lebanon; I've never been to that part of the world. There are all kinds of exciting things going on there." Moreover, I was bored and not being offered anything very interesting. So I said, "Well, I'll volunteer," but I never thought that they'd accept me, because I had no background at all in Middle Eastern affairs. Shortly after, I got a call from the State Department telling me to come to Washington to be interviewed by the ambassador, Reginald Bartholomew.

I went to Washington. He interviewed me. I guess he liked me. He conducted the interview mostly in French, to see whether I could speak French properly. And when I could, he chose me. I don't know how many other people had volunteered. Probably not very many. Later he told me that he wanted a seasoned veteran whom he could leave in charge knowing that he would not panic during one of Lebanon's inevitable crisis.

Q: It was a dangerous time.

MCNAMARA: Yes, they'd just blown up the embassy for the second time. Anyway, he took me, and I went off to Beirut.

Q: Okay, why don't we stop here, and we'll talk about Beirut, et cetera...

MCNAMARA: At another time.

Q: Today is November 10, 1993. This is tape number twelve of a series of interviews with Terry McNamara. Terry, on our last tape, we discussed your career up to the time when you volunteered to go to Beirut as deputy chief of mission, and how Bartholomew picked you. In the first place, give me the dates you were in Beirut.

MCNAMARA: I believe it was from August 1985 until August of 1987, two years, precisely.

Q: Were you given any sort of marching orders when you went out to Beirut, of what you were supposed to do?

MCNAMARA: I wasn't given any very precise ones. I saw Dick Murphy, who was, at the time, the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs. We'd been junior officers together in Rhodesia. Thus, I was a known quantity to him. I remember him saying, "Do you really want to go to Beirut? It's a very dangerous place. What, are you crazy? What do you want to go there for?"

I couldn't give him a very good reason, except that I was a little bored where I was, in Stanford, writing a book. And I didn't have any great prospects for an assignment that interested me. Beirut interested me. I'd never been in the Middle East. I'd been to wars before, and that didn't particularly scare me. When I volunteered, I never expected actually to be taken, in any case. But when I was, I wasn't reluctant to go.

No, he didn't give me any marching orders. He just simply told me I was going out there, and I was going to be working with Bartholomew. I don't believe anybody said anything other than that.

Q: What was your impression of Bartholomew's reputation before you went out?

MCNAMARA: A very tough guy. A difficult man. Very bright, but also pretty abrasive. I found that his reputation was not fully warranted. He is very bright. He doesn't suffer fools easily, that's certainly true. But if you do a good job for him, he's a very easy guy to get along with. And if you have his respect, there really is no problem. I liked him very much. There's no question as to who's in charge, with him. He's very much the boss. He may ask your opinion, but he may or may not take it, which is good and bad. But also, from the very beginning with him, he went out of his way to share everything with me. Apparently, I gained his trust and respect. Our relationship was very good. Indeed, we remain friends.

Obviously, when I got there, I didn't know very much about Beirut or about the Middle East, since I'd never served there and really had no special background. On the substantive side, in the beginning, I didn't have much to offer. However, I had been through other wars, and I was a good organizer. Quickly, Reg allowed me to run the day-to-day business of the embassy for him.

Q: What was the situation in Lebanon in this '85 to '87 period?

MCNAMARA: It was explosive. The Marines had been blown up. We lost some 240 Marines the year before.

Q: There was a bomber from the fundamentalist Islamic...

MCNAMARA: Well, I'm not sure who actually did it.

Also, our embassy had been blown up twice. Originally, the embassy was located in West Beirut. Incredibly, a man was allowed to drive a van loaded with explosives up to the front door. The explosion killed a lot of the people at the embassy. This was only maybe a year before I arrived.

They then moved the chancery to Christian East Beirut. A hill site was chosen and fortified. They rented a house on the crest of a hill, and dug trenches, placed vehicle barriers and strung razor wire. It was like the Maginot line. Our offices were in several buildings at different levels on the slope of the hill. My office had rocket shields outside with walls of sand bags. The rock protection was important. And ill-intended person could fire rockets from a distance at our buildings. A heavy wire mesh was placed outside the building to deflect or explode a rocket coming in before it actually hit the building itself. The whole place was an armed camp. We had a guard force of five hundred Lebanese armed with machine guns, RPGs (rocket-propelled grenade launchers) and M-16s. They amounted to a light-infantry battalion. At the compound entrances, which were very heavily fortified and guarded, they had vehicles "devastators" They were steel barriers that rose from the middle of the road, with wicked teeth on their outer edge. Certainly no car could drive in. Maybe a tank could get through, but nothing aside from a tank could get through that. I think there were only two or three entrances that were open into the complex that we'd built on the side of this hill.

A few months before I arrived, a fanatic with a truck full of explosives had gotten into this area, despite all of the precautions and the defenses, and had blown up this truck just outside what we called the embassy annex in East Beirut. In fact, it was the embassy at that point. It was a good-sized office building. The upper stories were still a shambles when I got to Beirut. Bartholomew, who was in the building at the time, talking to the British ambassador, was badly wounded. It killed a few people and wounded a lot more.

Nonetheless, they were very lucky. The truck driver was trying to get down under the building into a garage. If he had succeeded, everybody in the building would have been killed. It would have been another Marine-barracks affair. Luckily guards realized that something was amiss when the truck approached the chancery at an increasing speed. The British ambassador's guards who were waiting outside the building shot at him. One story is that they were the ones who killed him. Others say that it was shots fired by our guards. I'm not certain. In any case, there were a lot of people shooting. Fortunately, he was hit before he could turn into the entrance to the underground parking area.

I came just after this. Bartholomew was back. He was mended. He was in charge again. Psychologically, at least, he didn't seem any the worse for wear. Obviously, you don't go through something like that without it having some effect on you. Reg, however, showed no signs of trauma that I could detect.

Q: I take it you were without family.

MCNAMARA: Yes, wives and children had been evacuated a few months earlier. East Beirut is the Christian part of Beirut, which was relatively friendly to us. We were safer there than we would have been in West Beirut. West Beirut, as you will perhaps recall, was where they were kidnapping westerners. Our station chief, Buckley, had been grabbed on the street, and other Americans, including Terry Anderson, were being held captive. We really could not have lived in West Beirut. We moved to East Beirut, where, although it was still dangerous, it was much less dangerous than in the West. Americans were clearly targeted by radical elements among the fundamentalist Shiites who were under the strong influence of Iranians.

I couldn't bring my family with me. I set as a condition for my going that my wife and kids would be safe-havened in Paris. I could get to see them there more easily and my wife had family in Paris who could provide her with support. Bartholomew assured me that I could go to Paris every three months to see them. He also told me there was a permanent telephone link with Paris, which Phil Habib had put in when he was visiting Beirut that could be used to communicate directly with my family. We had direct dialing to numbers in Paris. This was a perfect solution for me, because a lot of my wife's family lived in Paris. She had two sisters and a brother who lived there with their families. In addition, she had a network of cousins, aunts, uncles and close friends in France. Thus, she would have plenty of support in Paris. It was far better, from our point of view, than staying in Washington or elsewhere in the U.S.

So I took them to Paris. I had orders for safe-havening in Paris. When I got there, the embassy wasn't very welcoming, nor were they especially supportive. We had to find our own place to live. One of my brothers-in-law let me borrow an old car. Each day, Nhu De and I checked le Figaro for apartments to let. Finally, we found a nice apartment in the Seventeenth Arrondissement near the Parc Monceau, after looking for two weeks.

At the same time, people assigned to the embassy were looking for apartments. The embassy, of course, was looking for apartments for them. In cases that I knew of, it took nine or ten months to find them apartments. I strongly suspect that the Frenchman in the housing office was getting kickbacks from landlords. That was a suspicion; I don't have any proof of that.

But, anyway, morale was dreadful in the embassy in Paris. People were constantly complaining about not being adequately supported. At the same time, on our own, we found a very nice apartment which, by any standards, would have been acceptable for a middle-level officer and his family. Maybe not the DCM in Paris, but certainly a middle-level officer.

Bartholomew's wife was also in Paris at this point. The embassy had let her use one of their apartments. This was done, however, at the Ambassador's insistence as a courtesy to a colleague in distress. Otherwise, I doubt that even Bartholomew would have been given anything but the most cursory support.

My predecessor's wife was sent home after the second embassy explosion. This was one of the reasons that he curtailed his assignment. He just didn't want to be there without his wife. Also, he had heart trouble. I could never understand how the Department could send someone with a weak heart to Beirut at that time. In fact, he had an oxygen bottle in the back of his car to be used in emergencies.

Q: Well, Terry, you got your wife settled.

MCNAMARA: I got her settled, and then I went off to Beirut.

I had to fly to Cyprus and then take a U.S. Navy helicopter from Cyprus over to the embassy in Beirut. We had a helicopter landing pad on the embassy grounds, and the Navy was flying us in and out at this point. That was our only means of arriving or departing from Beirut.

Q: Let me ask a very obvious question. What the hell were we doing there under those conditions? Why were we there? A question that I and many of my compatriots in the Foreign Service used to ask was: "Why didn't we just pull out?"

MCNAMARA: Certainly, we could have pulled out, and it probably wouldn't have made a great deal of difference, except that we did still have the hostages to think of. From their point of view, if we had pulled out, there would have been a feeling of abandonment. That might not fully justify keeping an embassy open and keeping other people at risk, but, nonetheless, it was a factor.

Another was the political factor of having a presence in Lebanon. Lebanon, after all, was on the northern border of Israel. It also bordered Syria. The Syrians were in fact occupying 3/4 of the country. It was right in the middle of one of the great confrontations of our time. From a political standpoint, that was important.

Also, we had historically supported Lebanon's political independence. Had we moved out, I suppose there would have been an element of abandonment there, too. Although no one would say this, this was true of the Christians. Really, our support was, I suppose, support of the Christian presence in the Middle East, and the Christians in Lebanon particularly. Also, the long American missionary presence with the bastion in the American University of Beirut was a powerful argument for continuing an American presence.

Q: All right, you're there in this situation. What sort of staffing did we have in the embassy, and how was it working?

MCNAMARA: The State Department set a maximum number of Americans who could be stationed in Lebanon. I believe the number was fifty. The guard force was all Lebanese. Of the fifty Americans, a large portion were security people who supervised and led this large guard force, who also provided close security for the ambassador and for me. We had a Marine guard detachment that worked only in the chancery. So I would say at least half of the American complement was made up of security people. We also had an Army colonel, a Marine major, and an Army warrant officer in the Defense attaché's office. They were there to observe the military situation. There was also a military advisory group with the Lebanese army; some five U.S. Army people. They were not physically at the embassy, but were there to support the Lebanese army. We'd supported the Lebanese army with equipment and some tactical advice. The embassy had a CIA contingent of four or five people. The State officers included a consular officer, two State political officers, an economic officer, two administrative officers and two American secretaries.

Q: How did you find the morale, and what were the problems? You were in charge of running the place.

MCNAMARA: The morale was very good. As so often happens in a place like that, there was a great deal of camaraderie among Americans. Close relationships develop when people are isolated and in danger. Morale was very good, in contrast to Paris. Here, you were living in the middle of a real war, in a very threatening situation. Americans had been singled out for special hostility in Lebanon. We were all potential hostages. In Paris, one of the most comfortable and agreeable cities in the world, morale was lousy at the embassy. I can't explain why.

Q: It's the brotherhood, the ties, this sort of thing, I think. Large embassies almost invariably have problems.

MCNAMARA: In these circumstances, personal relationships became close. We relied on one another. We were much closer to one another. One didn't have a private life. We lived together. I had a beautiful apartment-a whole floor of a new apartment building on the side of a mountain, with a superb view. But, I was guarded closely around the clock. An awful lot of my social life was with others at the embassy. We were thrown together at work and in our social lives. Nonetheless, I was out with Lebanese every day, too. I had a very active social life, despite the threatening security situation.

Q: How did the embassy operate? The normal embassies, you get out, you circulate, you send in reports. I'm talking about the core of the embassy, the consular officer, the political, the economic.

MCNAMARA: At most times, we were not restricted to the embassy compound or our homes. Only the Marines lived within the compound; we lived outside the compound. I was out virtually every night. I had a wide circle of Lebanese friends, as did everyone in the embassy. We were invited to all kinds of social functions by wealthy Lebanese. We circulated among the Lebanese. The problem, of course, was that we were circulating among the Lebanese that it was safe to circulate among. We were restricted to East Beirut, which was mainly Maronite Christian. Therefore, we were cut off from two-thirds of the people of the country. We had fleeting contact with them, the mainly Muslim population in West Beirut and elsewhere in the country. Our contacts therefore were restricted and selective by the very nature of the circumstances.

Q: Did you find that this presented a problem of one-sidedness? I did an interview with Bob Dillon, who was saying how it was so difficult because you were sort of captured by this Christian Lebanese elite, which was really becoming, not peripheral, but less...

MCNAMARA: Well, they weren't central, as they had been previously. The Lebanese government didn't control much at this point. The president controlled his palace, if he controlled that. The fiction of Lebanese sovereignty, however, was politically important to us as a symbol. The Syrians had seized effective control of most of the country. The Israelis controlled the south, along the border, the Syrians controlled the Bekaa Valley and thus they dominated about 3/4 of the country. The central government controlled very little.

They did have the army, which was the one instrument that remained to them. Although the army had split into Muslim and Christian elements, there were still connections, and the general staff still met once a week. For at least a year after I arrived, there was an element of unity within the army. The army was probably the only national institution that still existed in any kind of form, and it was an institution for moderation. In principle, it opposed the militias.

Now if you want me to, I can describe my arrival.

Q: Yes, would you?

MCNAMARA: Well, I came from Cyprus on a helicopter, and I landed in the embassy grounds. Bartholomew was at the landing pad to meet me. He was accompanied by most of the Americans. The arrivals and departures of Americans were important to those stationed in Beirut. As we walked up the hillside from the pad, shells started to come in, very close, on our hillside. Somebody was shelling from West Beirut. I remember Bartholomew telling me, "Get down! Get down!" But I didn't want to lie down in the dirt, because I was wearing a new suit. So I bent down, without getting the suit dirty.

That was my welcome to Beirut, a nice shelling by field pieces and Russian Katusha rockets. At the time, East Beirut was going through a period of intense shelling by one of the militias in West Beirut. It went on for two or three weeks after I got there.

I remember another time, just after I got there. There was a guy named Terry Lombacher, who was the AID representative. He managed a small, residual AID program focused on humanitarian assistance. He was a very colorful character. Physically enormous, he looked like Earthquake McGoon.

Q: In the comic strip "Li'l Abner."

MCNAMARA: Yes. He wore a beard and a moustache, and weighed some 250 to 300 pounds. He carried some fat, but was fairly fit. He had been in the Special Forces and had spent a good deal of time in Vietnam in the Army and later as a CORD's advisor. He and I had lots of mutual friends from Vietnam. He took me under one of his enormous wings when I got there. We became very close friends. He invited me for lunch to his house, just after my arrival. He lived on the top floor of an apartment building, just down the street from where I was living. After we finished a very civilized lunch, we went out on his balcony with cognac and cigars. Suddenly a barrage of rockets began to land in the valley beneath his house. You could see the rounds landing, one...two...three, walking their way up the valley towards us. I was fascinated by it. Lombacher finally said, "You know, I think we ought to go down to the basement. Those are coming towards us."

And I said, "You know, I think you're right."

So we picked up a bottle of cognac. He ordered his retainers to bring chairs, a table, candles, coffee, all of the things that we might want to sit out the barrage in comfort. We then repaired to the basement where we remained until the bombardment ended.

This experience was not at all unusual.

Q: Well, again, so here you were. Your political and economic officers, and the consular officer, what were they doing?

MCNAMARA: Well, the consular officer was occupied with consular problems. Lebanese all have many relatives in the U.S. There is much traffic between the two countries. Many Lebanese have dual citizenships and more hold "green cards". Babies are born, people get married. Visas must be issued. The consular load is heavy.

Q: You were issuing visas and the whole thing?

MCNAMARA: Oh, yes, all the normal consular work went on. Chris English, who had been my consular officer when I was ambassador in Gabon was the consular officer. We were old friends. He was doing the full range of consular work. There was no reason not to issue visas to Lebanese. We had nothing against the Lebanese. With all of their American connections, of course, there was a sizeable American community still there-dual citizenship community. Indeed, there were almost no Americans who didn't have dual citizenship, who remained in the country. There was a nun, who was the head of Catholic Relief Services, and a few other long term residents.

The political officers carried on a regular reporting program, but their contacts were restricted mainly to people living in the Christian enclave. Occasionally, they got to speak to others.

Q: Could you deal with any of the militias?

MCNAMARA: Oh, yes, we could deal with some of them. For instance, Danny Chamoun was a militia leader.

Q: He was the son of Camille Chamoun, who had been president for many years.

MCNAMARA: The ex-president, yes. In the East, we were not dealing with the leader of the Lebanese Front, the biggest Christian militia, because it was felt that he was trying to shoot his way into power and get rid of the president. At the time, we were very protective of the president, Amin Gemayel, who had gotten the presidency after his brother was killed. I thought it was silly to draw such distinction between the thugs that controlled the militias. I also thought we over did our deference to Gemayel. But that was the policy. I can understand why we wished to preserve the legitimacy of the presidency, but to a great extent, Gemayel's presidency was fictional. By the time I got there, he had little real support left. Our support of his presidency was probably his single most important prop.

The political officers, the ambassador and I talked to a limited circle of people. I don't think we needed even the reduced complement at the embassy. We probably could have done without the two political officers, and certainly without an economic officer. But this was what had been decided after they drew down the numbers when the East Beirut embassy annex had been blown up.

Q: What about contacts with the Syrians? You say the Syrians were in effective control.

MCNAMARA: We had no contacts with the Syrians.

Q: Was that policy?

MCNAMARA: That was policy, yes. And also it was a matter of fact. They were in West Beirut, and we were in East Beirut, and at that point, we were not going over to West Beirut at all.

Q: What was the feeling about the Syrians?

MCNAMARA: We felt that the Syrians were, at this point, really an army of occupation, and that they were trying to manipulate the situation to their benefit. And we were opposing this.

I felt, personally, that the Syrians had never accepted the partition of greater Syria and the creation of the Lebanese State by the French after World War I. They really felt a manifest destiny, that Lebanon was part of their natural patrimony, and that Syria and Lebanon should be one country. The French, the Syrians felt, had manipulated the peace settlement after World War I to favor the Maronite Christians. A country was created that they could dominate.

To a great extent, of course, there's a lot of truth in this. However, Syria, as we know it, is also a creation of the Allies after World War I and II. Syria was really a creation of the Allied powers after World War I, when the Ottoman Empire was broken up. Syria had never been a country in modern times, so these things are obviously a point of view. However, from the Syrian point of view, they have never been reconciled to this breaking up of what they reckon as the greater Syria. Of course, this geographic concept also included parts of Jordan and Israel.

The Syrians remain unreconciled. Their reluctance to withdraw from Lebanon can only partially be explained by Israeli presence in the south. The present Lebanese government is their prisoner. For the present, Lebanon's position as a captive state suits the Syrians.

Gemayel, however was not under their control. We protected his position. The Syrians allowed this symbol of Lebanese sovereignty because they feared a reaction by the Israelis with our strong support, if they moved against the last vestige of Lebanese independence.

Q: Did you have any contact with the Israelis, or was that beyond your ken, too?

MCNAMARA: We had no direct contact with the Israelis. Our contact was through the embassy in Tel Aviv. I had no contact with the Israelis. I did have contact with Lebanese Jews, however, so that, by extension, I had some relationship with the Israelis. The Israelis were concerned for their safety. I tried to watch out for them. That was one of the jobs that Bartholomew gave me.

Q: In your, obviously, limited contacts with the Christian elite, what were their feelings towards Israel and towards Syria at that time?

MCNAMARA: They were ambivalent. Most of the Lebanese Christians were fearful of the Syrians and very worried that the Syrians would take over the rest of the country. Although they had earlier invited the Syrians into Lebanon to save them from Druze and Muslim attack, at this point, they feared and were antagonistic towards the Syrians. However, there were Christians who were pro-Syria. Former President Franjieh in the north of Lebanon, was very pro-Syrian. There were others who favored Syria, often for their own personal advantage. Support for Syria was especially strong among the small Greek Orthodox minority who viewed the Syrians as protection against the larger Maronite Christian sect that had dominated Lebanon since its formation at the end of World War II.

As far as Israel is concerned, the Israelis had supported the Christians previously-directly, militarily. When they invaded Lebanon and came up to Beirut, that was in support, to a great extent, of the Maronite Christians, and in collaboration with them. There was no question of that. And so there was still a good deal of residual good feeling towards the Israelis among the Maronite Christians, and the hope that the Israelis would be their protectors and not allow the Syrians to come and dominate the whole country. Of course, the Israeli presence in the south and the Israeli threat did restrain the Syrians from going too far. Israeli presence in the south also kept the Palestinians under control.

Q: Did you have any contact with the Druze, and what was our feeling towards them?

MCNAMARA: We had contact with Jumblatt. The ambassador went up there once or twice. After Bartholomew left and I was charged $\frac{1}{2}$, I visited Walid Jumblatt in his mountains. Walid Jumblatt's father, Kamal, had been killed by the Syrians in 1977, and Walid Jumblatt did not like the Syrians. He would have opposed the Syrians, but knew that this was not possible. They made it very clear to him that he too would be eliminated, if he became an impediment to their ambitions. Walid Jumblatt had personal relationships across sectarian lines. He and Danny Chamoun were close personal friends. He had saved Danny Chamoun when one of the other Christian militias went after Chamoun and wiped out his militia.

Q: Amal?

MCNAMARA: Amal was the more secular Shiite militia. Bartholomew often talked to him on the telephone. He was very much tied to the Syrians. Amal was. They were at daggers drawn with the PLO. The Palestinians had virtually taken over Lebanon at one point. They still held strong positions in Beirut and in the South. They were still a problem, and there was open fighting between the Palestinians and Amal. They had lots of little wars going on among these groups.

Q: This was going on more or less the whole time you were there?

MCNAMARA: Yes. There was fighting all while I was in Lebanon. We had hostages in the bag. A few of them got out while I was there, but basically, when one got out, they'd pick up others to replace him. So they always had ready bodies in the bag.

Q: Before we move to the hostage problem, what was your feeling, and maybe Bartholomew's and the rest of the embassy's, about how this whole thing was going to work out and the concerns for whatever American policy was in the area?

MCNAMARA: Well, as to how the problem of Lebanon would work out, I always felt that there was no solution in Lebanon, without a solution to the larger problem of the Israeli-Arab relationship. You couldn't solve the problem internally in Lebanon without solving that bigger problem. Every time someone got close to solving the problem between the factions-the religious factions and political factions within Lebanon-it seemed that somebody from outside would intervene and spoil the attempts at finding a solution. The Syrians, the Iranians, the Israelis, somebody would do something that would prevent the Lebanese from coming together.

God knows it would have been difficult enough for the Lebanese, under any circumstances, to come together, because there were blood feuds and deep religious divisions and a feeling among Shiites that the old distribution of power was not fair to them, that their numbers had grown since the historic agreement had been made setting up Lebanon.

Q: Fifty-fifty.

MCNAMARA: No, it wasn't fifty-fifty. Power was mainly in the hands of the Maronite Christians and the Sunni Muslims. The president would always be a Maronite, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of the National Assembly would be a Shiite. Well, the speaker of the National Assembly was not nearly as powerful as the other two figures. No election had been held since the early seventies. The Shiites felt that the apportionment of deputies in the National Assembly was not fair. Their population had been growing rapidly as the proportion of Maronites and Sunnis had declined. No census had been taken in decades, but most impartial observers felt that the Shia made up over half the population. The Maronites were probably 40% or less and the Sunni were fewer. Power needed to be redistributed. That had to be solved if there were ever to be a reasonable solution to the Lebanese problem.

Q: Well, I take it that, while you were there, it was really just almost a watching brief.

MCNAMARA: That's all.

Q: Let's talk about the hostage business. What was the situation and what was happening while you were there?

MCNAMARA: Well, there were, I think, five or six hostages.

Q: These were Americans.

MCNAMARA: Yes, I'm only talking about the Americans. There were a few more, but basically, I was focused on the Americans. That was my greatest preoccupation while I was there, watching for any indication that we could get them out somehow or other. We sought valid go-betweens, anything that might help us get the hostages released. We did not even have a clear idea of where they were being held.

Shortly after I arrived, the Reverend Weir was released. I was deeply involved in this. In Beirut, we had no warning that this was going to take place. There was always talk of something happening, but we had no hard indications that anything was going to happen.

Bartholomew arranged a visit to the north, to see former President Franjeh, an idiosyncratic figure who was wholly committed to the Syrians. To go up there, he had to cross Syrian lines. Anyway, he went up there and left me in charge of the embassy in Beirut.

It was well understood that we could not go into West Beirut. His instructions to me on that score were clear, "No way go into West Beirut. It's too dangerous." We had many warnings that we would be in grave danger if we went into West Beirut.

After he left, I had contact with Bartholomew by radio. We had a secure radio communication.

That night, after he'd left, his secretary had a party. I remember that the Washington Post correspondent, Nora Boustani, was at the party. She'd been invited, and she'd come over to East Beirut from West Beirut, where she lived. Suddenly, a telephone call came for me. I went into another room. It was the acting Rector from the American University of Beirut. He told me that Reverend Weir had suddenly shown up on his doorstep, and could I please get him the hell out of there. He was very nervous. So I talked to him and said, "Well, can you get him to the Green Line? We can pick him up there."

And he said, "Well, I can't do anything tonight, but tomorrow I'm supposed to go to a ceremony near the Green Line. I will put him in the car and take him to the Green Line and drop him off. Please pick him up at the crossing point."

Q: Now the Rector was an American?

MCNAMARA: No, he was a Lebanese. The Americans at AUB were gone or being held as hostages.

As I understood it, the arrangement was that the Rector would take Weir to the Green Line and we would pick him up. That was fine; I didn't have to send Americans in and expose them in West Beirut. Weir was with him at that point. He'd been dropped off by his captors on the fringe of the campus and made his way to the Rector's house. I guess he was dropped off near the Rector's house. Anyway, this was all set. I informed Bartholomew and told him what was happening. This was all supposed to take place at eight or nine o'clock the following morning. I'd alerted all my guys that this was going to happen, and we were all set to do our part in the pick-up.

Suddenly, at about seven, seven-thirty the next morning, I got another call from the Rector. He had second thoughts. He pleaded with me, "Oh, you've got to get him out of here right away."

And I said, "But aren't you going to bring him to the Green Line?"

"No, I can't do that. I can't. It's too dangerous. I can't do it. You've got to get him out of here today. I'm leaving at eight-thirty, and you've got to have him out of my house."

And I said, "Well, I'll do my very best. We'll get him out of there somehow or other this morning."

So I called my staff together in the embassy. At this point, we had a group from the Special Forces, the real commandos...

Q: Delta Force?

MCNAMARA: Delta Force. I had some of them there. There was a lieutenant colonel from the Delta Force there. He was at my meeting with the CIA station chief, the Defense Attaché, the State Department security officer and one of his assistants. The political officer was also there. I asked them, "How do we do this?" None of the Special Forces or the CIA had any ideas. The State security chief suggested that, "We can go in and get him."

And I asked, "Is there any other way?"

I didn't want to take that chance, because I'd been warned that it was very dangerous for Americans to go in. And this could have been a setup, to draw Americans into an ambush. I didn't know; I wasn't sure what it was, but we had to get this guy out quickly. We couldn't leave him there, but yet I didn't want to expose more Americans than I had to.

We talked around the problem. Finally, one of the State security types, I think it was Scott McLeod, commented that, "the British go over there all the time to visit their embassy in the West. The Ambassador's security detail is made up of SAS commandos."Q: They are specially trained military people.

MCNAMARA: Oh, yes, these are commandos, really very tough guys. They are at least as good as our Delta Force. They taught the Delta Force how to do what they do.

Anyway, I said, "Well, maybe that's it. Maybe we can get them to go and get him. But an American has to be with them. We can't send foreigners over to get our guy. They can provide the transport for us, and the cover, but I can't ask them to go over and pick up our guy without an American with them."

Scott McLeod immediately volunteered to go with them. He knew the Brits well, because he was on our ambassador protection detail and they were on their ambassador's protection detail, and they often worked together.

I said, "Okay. I'll call the British ambassador and ask him if he will have his guys come over, pick up Scott, take him with them, and pick Weir up and bring him back." Everyone agreed.

I called the British ambassador, and he said, "Yes, of course."

I had only just arrived in Beirut. He did not know me but there was no hesitation on his part. He said, "Of course, we will," when I explained the circumstances.

So, the Brits took Scott to the AUB campus. When they arrived Scott got out of the car with one of the Brits, and knocked on the Rector's door. Weir was in the house, with the Rector's sister, who was very nervous. Weir came out with them, got in the car. They came back over the line, and that was that. Weir was in our hands. We had him.

I couldn't tell anybody how we got him out. In fact, we couldn't even say that he got out. But I took him up to the embassy, and I talked to him for a couple of hours while we were waiting for a helicopter to take him out to the fleet, where they debriefed him and got him back to the United States. But, even to this day, I don't think anyone knows exactly how he got out, aside from ourselves.

Q: Because you didn't want to expose the British to retaliation.

MCNAMARA: Didn't want to expose the British, and also Weir was warned not to reveal anything about his release and so on. So we kept it all quiet. We were told to, by Washington.

Washington was ecstatic. We had extracted Weir without any problems and without any publicity. They were tickled that it was done as it was done. Bartholomew was upset that he hadn't been there, but he was also very relieved that the whole thing was well handled. Even though we had to ad hoc it at the end, we were flexible enough to do it, and we got him out without any problems. Ultimately I got a medal for Scott, albeit only a Meritorious Honor Award. He certainly deserved one. He should have gotten more than that for going in. I also wrote letters from Bartholomew to the British ambassador, thanking him, and thanking each of his bodyguards who were involved. Hopefully, they were appropriately rewarded by their own government. Perhaps the Secretary of State communicated with the foreign minister or something. I don't remember now. It may have happened.

My debriefing of Weir was interesting. He told me that he was held alone for much of the time. He didn't reveal anything then, I don't think, that hasn't come out in the newspapers since, aside from just how he was brought from West Beirut. He never told anybody, and we never told anybody. But now I don't see any reason for keeping it a secret. Hell, the hostages are all out, and it doesn't jeopardize anybody. And it would certainly be nice if the British got the recognition for helping us that they deserve.

Q: Did you get involved with the operations of the National Security Council on the hostage thing?

MCNAMARA: Yes, I did and I didn't. While Bartholomew was there, we got other alerts that hostages were coming out. We were alerted several times. Reggie talked to McFarlane on the radio.

Q: Bud McFarlane was the national security advisor.

MCNAMARA: Yes. When he had a call, Reggie would take me to the radio room with him so that I heard the whole conversation. He had McFarlane turned on so that I could hear the whole conversation. The two of us were together. Thus, I knew everything that he knew. At least, as far as I know, I did. Who can ever say. I've been ambassador, and there are some things that you don't even share with your DCM. But if you're smart, you do it as Reggie did. And so I was clued in while Reggie was there. In fact, some of the detailed communication was left to me and to Ollie North.

Q: Ollie North.

MCNAMARA: He and I were to handle the day-to-day stuff. Reggie talked to McFarlane; I talked to North. They expected something to come down. I think that was in November of '85. They expected some sort of a release at that point. Unfortunately, nothing happened, so we didn't get anyone else out at that time. Now I don't remember how that tied in with Irangate. But, of course, I knew nothing about anything like that, and Reggie didn't either, as far as I know.

Q: Did either McFarlane or North come to Lebanon while you were there?

MCNAMARA: McFarlane, no, because he lost the job, or got out of the job as national security advisor not too long after that. I don't remember exactly when it was. But North came later on, after Reggie had gone and when John Kelly was ambassador. Now, at that point, I really wasn't clued in. Kelly was keeping things to himself. He knew a lot more about this sort of thing than I was aware of. This was a year after the Weir release.

One night, a helicopter arrived with Ollie North, Terry Waite, General Secord, and another shadowy figure whose name I don't remember. I believe he worked for the CIA, or had worked for the CIA. I don't really know anything about him, but he didn't seem to play a very big role. Ollie North occupied center stage leaving me with the impression of a loud-mouthed cowboy. Lots of bravado. He seemed like a silly man to me. Secord and I had been classmates in the Naval War College. None of our classmates took him seriously; they all thought he was crazy and a lightweight. But, there he was. When they first arrived, they were closeted for a long time with Kelly alone. I was not being kept up on any of this. Then the DAO and I were called in.

Q: Department of the Army?

MCNAMARA: No, Defense Attaché. He was an Army colonel named Jim Ritchey. He and I were called in along with the CIA station chief. Ollie North told us that they were hoping to get two or three hostages released. Arrangements had been made, and we could expect something to happen in the very near future.

I'm still not sure what Terry Waite's role was in all this.

Q: Terry Waite was an Anglican priest.

MCNAMARA: No, he's an Anglican layman, who was the representative of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

I knew Terry fairly well, because Terry had come to East Beirut and stayed in a CIA safe house for about a week, hoping to go over to West Beirut and do something to get hostages out. He was kept there clandestinely by the CIA. The station chief informed me of his presence since I was the chargé d'affaires at the time. I visited him every night, took him food. Indeed, I remember bringing a bottle of champagne which we drank together. I was trying to keep his morale up and to make sure that he was okay. He was being guarded by people from the Lebanese army's intelligence group. They wore civilian clothes and were separate from the regular army. They had close relations with the CIA. The guy in charge of army intelligence was a Colonel Cassis. He was close to President Gemayel providing muscle for the President. I assume the CIA had arranged for their help with Waite. Anyway, the station chief and I went down and saw him regularly. As a result I got to know Terry fairly well. So when he came, of course, he and I joked together.

I remember North telling several of us (this was not in Kelly's office) that he would take revenge on family members of the people who were holding the hostages. North claimed that some of these relatives resided in London. If anything untoward happened to the hostages, North implied that he would have these relatives killed. He seemed to consider the whole situation a game with himself as the principal player. Kill. That was my interpretation of what he said.

Q: In other words, but it was all part of this...

MCNAMARA: He was a cowboy. Not anybody that you would have great faith in. But, Jesus, I couldn't imagine how anybody could have any confidence in such a loud-mouthed, cowboy.

Q: He may be your senator.

MCNAMARA: He may be. But he was very frightening in Lebanon because he was playing with some highly explosive things. The fact that he had Secord with him made me even more nervous. I knew Secord from the Naval War College where he was considered crazy. Anyway, the impression North and his entourage gave made me very nervous. He said, "We're going to get some hostages out." He was expecting two or three, not one. Ultimately, we did get one, David Jacobsen, who had been director of the American University Hospital. I went over to West Beirut and got him.

Q: How was Ambassador Kelly reacting to this? Did you share with him your concern about the lightweight-ness of these people?

MCNAMARA: Well, I told him about Secord, whom I knew. Nonetheless, he seemed to be very impressed with what was going on. He didn't share with me all that went on with North. We did not have the same relationship that I had with Bartholomew. Kelly was much more reserved. I think part of it was that he was unsure of himself.

Q: This was not his field, really, was it?

MCNAMARA: No, he knew little about Lebanon or the Middle East. Moreover, he had never been in a confused combat area before. He'd been a deputy assistant secretary for Europe. He knew virtually nothing about the Middle East. He had never before had an important job overseas. I don't think he had been a DCM. He'd certainly never been an ambassador.

Q: I guess we were having a hard time getting people to go there, for one thing.

MCNAMARA: No, I don't think so, not as ambassador. No, they would have had trouble with some people, but there are so many people who are hungry to become ambassadors that they wouldn't have had any problem finding a good ambassador.

Kelly was well connected. His brother was in the White House, working in the NSC, a political appointee. I gather the family had some connections with Reagan or Bush. John was a bright guy, and he had done very well in the Department bureaucracy. He no doubt has lots of friends in Washington.

Anyway, he got the job. I had been there, by the time he arrived, for more than a year, and I'd been chargé d'affaires for several months after Bartholomew left and John arrived. He relied on me for interpretation of what was going on, and always asked my views and advice. Usually he took my advice. But he didn't confide in me an awful lot. He told me nothing of what North and his associates were up to in regard to the hostages. No doubt, he was sworn to secrecy on these delicate affairs.

Q: This thing is insidious, anyway. You get people who come out and say, "This is very hush-hush. We're working on behalf of the President of the United States, directly." It grabs people, and it leads them into very peculiar places.

MCNAMARA: Ollie North came from the White House proclaiming that he was the personal representative of the President. Kelly was probably under instructions not to say anything to me. I never have blamed Kelly for any of this. It's not his fault. He was a victim of the craziness that was going on in the White House. I'm sure that he'd been told not to tell anybody else, and so he didn't. What do you do when a person who you think really does represent the President tells you to keep quiet and not to tell anybody? Pretty difficult. You're put in almost an impossible situation. Do remember that it was not just me that was left out of the loop. George Shultz accused Kelly of failing to keep him informed.

Q: How did this thing play out after you had your meeting? You were there for almost a year more. How did this all end?

MCNAMARA: I'm not sure of the exact timing. But Kelly suddenly said that he had to go to London for a meeting, and I was to be the chargé d'affaires. He left. On that very night, on television, I saw the Secretary of State, Shultz, get up and denounce Kelly for not keeping him informed-of hiding information from the Secretary of State.

Q: Kelly?

MCNAMARA: Kelly. Well, Irangate was just coming out at this time. Shultz was testifying before the Senate. In a most dramatic way, Shultz proclaimed that he had not known of the attempts to make deals with the Iranians over hostage release. Jesus Christ. I mean, all of this stuff had suddenly come out, that we were fooling around with the Iranians, and that we were secretly negotiating for the freedom of hostages. It was like a bomb shell. Our public position had always been that we would not negotiate for the release of hostages. I had never, in my wildest dreams, thought about deals being concocted with the Iranians. Personally, I was shocked.

I remember being called by Nora Boustani of the Washington Post. She called several people at the embassy trying to get information or comment. I remember telling her, "I know nothing about any of this." She acted as if she thought this was "no comment" stuff. I was really bouleversé, as the French say. I just couldn't believe such a deception could have taken place on an issue involving such basic principle and honor. Obviously, I was very naive. I told Nora that aside from what I had seen on TV, Kelly has gone to a meeting outside Lebanon. "I really don't know anything about it. I can't tell you anything, because I don't know anything."

Q: And then what happened?

MCNAMARA: Then the Washington Post quoted a diplomat in Beirut as having told Nora Boustani that he knew nothing about any secret negotiations with anyone over the hostages and was as shocked by Shultz's remarks as anyone else. The next day I got a telephone call from April Glaspie who was the country director for Lebanon. I didn't have an awful lot of admiration for April. April is a person who has encyclopedic knowledge of things Arab. She acts as though she had a monopoly of knowledge on all things involving the Middle East. In short, she is a very arrogant lady, and a pain in the ass.

An awful lot of business there was transacted on the telephone, which I always thought was very dangerous. One, it leads to misunderstandings. Two, there is no written record of what went on, and that is dangerous, too, for all parties, especially those who were exposed. But the possibility of misunderstanding is what worried me most. And I just didn't like using the telephone to discuss complex, important matters. A secure line, okay, but the question of passing instructions and so on by telephone I think is a very bad idea.

Anyway, April was always on the telephone. So she called me and she said, "Did you read what Boustani wrote?" And I, of course, hadn't read it. I didn't know anything about it. She said, "Did you say anything like that?"

And I said, "No. I talked to Nora Boustani, and I told her I knew nothing of any attempts to exchange arms for hostages, which I didn't."

She then demanded, "Well who did 'undercut' Ambassador Kelly in speaking to a journalist?"

I replied, "I really don't know."

She said, "Well, you must interrogate everybody in the embassy and find out who spoke so disloyally to Nora."

And I said, "No, I won't interrogate people. I'm sorry."

What the hell was I going to do? If somebody expressed shock and dismay to Nora Boustani, what was I going to do, hang them up by their thumbs? I admittedly spoke to Nora. Possibly some of it came from me, but some of it certainly did not. I know she talked to one or two other people. But, goddamn it, under those circumstances what could be expected. This was hardly a case of disloyalty.

April insisted that someone was "disloyal." With a nasty edge to her voice, she ordered me to find out who had been "disloyal to their Ambassador."

Jesus Christ, who was disloyal to whom? Were we disloyal to somebody, or was somebody disloyal to us? We were the guys who were sitting out there in harms way being told time over time that there would be no negotiations for hostages. All the time, freewheelers were carrying on negotiations with Iranians. Here, we see our Secretary of State on TV accusing our Ambassador of duplicity and we are not supposed to be surprised.

April often would go off like a rocket, an unguided rocket. She was very emotional and unpredictable. She had encyclopedic knowledge of all things Arab, but she had very poor judgment. I think she also felt that no one in Beirut was qualified to be there. None of the top management at the embassy were Arabists-Bartholomew, Kelly, me.

Q: Well, from a practical point of view, Lebanon was not really an Arabist post, was it? Looking at it objectively, I can't think of any other place in that so-called Arab world where the Arab currents were so atypical in nature, so that having an encyclopedic knowledge of how the Arab mind worked elsewhere really probably didn't play a hell of a lot of role there.

MCNAMARA: Well, probably less than in most other Arab countries, but it's still an Arab country. Also, knowledge of the history and of individuals is important. But it's not as important as April would have liked it to be. Being an Arabist, she felt that an Arabist should be in that job (she felt she should be in that job; not just an Arabist, but she), and that other people just weren't qualified. If you didn't have a 4.4 in Arabic, you just weren't qualified to hold these jobs.

Anyway, I had my problems with April, as did many others.

Q: Did you get any further repercussions, or was that pretty much it?

MCNAMARA: Well, she kept after me for a few days but finally gave up when she realized that I would not interrogate members of the embassy. When Kelly returned, he never mentioned the Boustani piece. I am sure that he had better sense than to make an issue of such a delicate question. Imagine how the press would have treated any attempt by the embassy or Department hierarchy to punish embassy personnel under such circumstances.

Q: Well, there was nothing particularly to say, outside of being shocked and not knowing.

MCNAMARA: That's about it. I don't remember exactly what the quotes were, but they probably reflected what most of us were feeling. I'm not sure where they all came from, and I don't really care. We were shocked. We were surprised and shocked. We were feeling, Here's the Secretary of State getting up denouncing our ambassador. We were wondering, What the Christ is going on? What is this? What kind of games were played behind our backs? Were we deceived or what?

Q: When this news came out, it wasn't a full revelation, but it was the news that we'd been playing around.

MCNAMARA: It was still a great shock for us, all of the people who were in Beirut. Certainly it was for me, and I think that it was for everybody else. We were shocked. Well, that's about all you can say: we were shocked.

Q: Well, how did it play in Beirut? The people that you were in contact with, what were they saying? Did you get any reflections of what our actions were doing, or not?

MCNAMARA: Well, the Lebanese had always assumed that conspiracies were being hatched. They expected such duplicity. I don't think it came as such a great shock or surprise to the Lebanese. That's how the Lebanese operate. It wasn't any big deal for them.

Q: What about Kelly when he came back? How long was he back before you left?

MCNAMARA: He came back in about a month after being denounced by Shultz. He was held in Washington, but Shultz finally allowed him to come back. I doubt that all was forgiven, but Kelly too was obviously just another dupe in a very duplicitous game. I suspect that Shultz himself was involved in some sort of power struggle in Washington.

Q: Because he became assistant secretary for Near Eastern Affairs.

MCNAMARA: Near Eastern Affairs, yes.

Some months later Kelly prepared to go on leave. That morning, just before his departure, prime minister Karame was killed in a helicopter. Somebody put a bomb in the helicopter, behind his seat, and killed him. They didn't knock the helicopter down, just killed him. Somebody very clever, obviously, who didn't want to knock the helicopter down. Well, Kelly went off on his leave, and I was chargé d'affaires, with a dead prime minister. It was an interesting couple of weeks.

By this time, a tenuous peace had settled over West Beirut. I had gone over and picked up David Jacobsen when he was released. Later, I had visited Karame in his apartment a couple of times. Then, when the grand mufti of Beirut had a service for Karame, I attended. I thought it was important for us to share the grief over the violent death of a moderate Muslim leader.

Another time I was charg ½, I made arrangements to go up and see former president Franjieh in North Lebanon. I'd been trying to get a meeting with Gemayel, to deliver some message from the State Department. For some reason, he kept putting me off. When he found that I was going to North Lebanon to see Franjieh he had his protocol man call late the night before my departure to inform me that Gemayel would receive me the next morning. I knew goddamn well that he was trying to keep me from going to North Lebanon. So I said, "I'm sorry, I'm committed to go to visit Franjieh tomorrow morning. I'll come to the presidency as soon as I get back."

The protocol man replied, "Oh, no, you've got to see the President right away."

I said, "I'm sorry, I've already committed myself to President Franjieh."

So he said, "Well, okay."

Later, I told April this, in one of our telephone conversations. She went off like a rocket. She said, "You did that to the president? You're going to get PNGed!" [persona non grata]

I assured her that, I'm not going to get PNGed. Gemayel is completely dependent on us. He's our creature. He controls nothing outside his palace. He's not going to react. His relationship with us is crucial to him."

I reasoned that one has to demonstrate to the Lebanese every now and then that you're a man, by saying no to something. The representative of the United States must insist on being treated with dignity by someone like Gemayel. If you don't do that, they'll have no respect for you, and they will walk all over you. That's just the way Lebanese are.

But she said, "Oh, you're going to get thrown out." I had one foot on the boat, according to April. "I'll try to patch it up with the ambassador," April said.

The ambassador in Washington was a complete asshole. He was Gemayel's man and April's contact. I gather April pleaded with him to assure Gemayel of our eternal support and apologized for a clumsy charg ½ d'affaires. Clearly, for anyone with any understanding of the Lebanese, this was the wrong thing to do.

Anyway, I went to North Lebanon, saw Franjieh, came back, and I saw Gemayel not long after. He was all smiles and affability as he inquired, "Did you enjoy your trip to North Lebanon? How is Mr. Franjieh?"

I replied that I had enjoyed the opportunity to get out of the narrow world of East Beirut and assured him that Franjieh was in good health.

He kept me in his office for an hour and a half, in our first informal, friendly chat. He recounted much of the history of Lebanon, albeit from his own point of view.

He kept me a long time and went out of his way to be very pleasant and friendly. Obviously, my calculated gesture of independence had impressed him favorably. April's version of fore-lock tugging obsequious diplomacy was not so affective in macho Lebanese circles.

Gemayel had set up a think tank of sorts. During the course of this meeting, I told him I'd love to visit it, and maybe I could get some help from some of the research institutions in the United States. I told him of my connections with Hoover. He was delighted with the prospect.

After that beginning, our relationship was warm and relatively informal.

My relations with April hit an all-time low as a result of this incident. They never really recovered. I lost whatever respect I had for her. Her low opinion of me was apparently confirmed. The fact that Gemayel went out of his way to praise me to Kelly only further rankled our troubled relationship.

Another time, not too long before I left, Kelly went off, and this was when Karame was killed. I can't imagine why Kelly left, with the prime minister just having been assassinated. This was a bit like April leaving on vacation two days before the Iraqis invaded Kuwait.

The CIA acting station chief came to me one day with what he described as "absolutely airtight intelligence" that the Syrians were going to start shelling East Beirut the next day. I didn't believe the report. Nonetheless, I could not ignore it. I was charged $\frac{1}{2}$ and responsible for the safety of our embassy personnel.

Q: Was there any reason why they'd be doing this?

MCNAMARA: I don't think so. It didn't make any sense to me. I didn't believe his report.

Major Hurley, a Marine major who was the assistant DAO, was acting in place of the regular DAO. Oddly, the station chief, the DAO and the ambassador were all absent. I sent Hurley, who was a very good officer and the best Arabic speaker in the embassy, to check out the report. He went right up into the forward positions of the Lebanese army, facing the Syrians, but could not find any evidence of Syrian preparations to mount a bombardment. They hadn't changed any of their dispositions. Hurley could see into their positions, and saw that they hadn't brought up extra artillery or extra shells. They hadn't even broken out their stocks of shells or anything. So he came back and told me that, "I don't believe it." There are no indications of any of the normal preparations for bombardment. Moreover, the Lebanese army commanders were equally skeptical of the report.

Hurley's observations reinforced my own doubts. Nonetheless, I felt I must take some precautions.

I didn't want to alert Washington and get them excited, because I didn't think there was anything to the report. But I still wanted to take some sort of precautions, so I asked the American colonel who was in charge of American military assistance, who controlled the helicopters coming into Beirut, "Can you have a helicopter come in to pick up some people tomorrow?" We had a helicopter scheduled for the day after. I asked, "Could you put it up one day? Please see if you can't get the schedule changed." And he said he'd do what he could. I told him privately my reason for asking and warned him not to pass this info on to the military in Europe who controlled the helicopters.

I told the non-essential people that anybody who wanted to go to Cyprus could have a long weekend off. This was my way of drawing down the numbers without doing so officially. I also sent out people who were in Beirut on temporary duty. Thus, it was not an official drawdown.

Anyway, the colonel failed to abide by my admonition not to pass on the questionable report to the HQ in Stuttgart. Rather he told them that I had ordered a drawdown, and wanted an evacuation helicopter the next day.

In Europe, they sent off flash messages to Washington that Beirut was drawing down personnel.

In the middle of the night I got calls from April and Kelly, who was in Washington, asking what the hell was going on.

I explained the situation and my reluctance to get people in Washington excited over a report that was of such questionable reliability. I insisted that I had taken the minimum prudent action.

George Shultz was in Iceland at the time at a summit conference. He raised hell because nobody told him that we were drawing down. I learned a hard lesson not to try to be too clever. Tell Washington everything in such circumstances. One can never rely on nervous subordinates following instructions. I had made a mistake, not in the way I handled the situation on the ground but in my dealings with Washington. I had played right into April's hands.

Kelly came back, and I admitted to him that I should have called on the telephone and warned the Department. The problem was that my relations with April Glaspie were bad, and therefore that personal element probably entered into my reluctance to call the Department. If it had been somebody else who was country director, I might well have called. But under the circumstances, I didn't. Plus, I didn't like to use the telephones, because I didn't think it was a good idea. My action was further influenced by a fear that April might well have gone off in an unexpected way and declared that we had to have a formal evacuation. God knows. You couldn't predict what she was going to do.

So, anyway, that was a small tiff that I had.

But when Kelly got back and started to chew me out, I told him, "Look, I did what I thought was right. Now maybe I should have called somebody. But that's the only thing I would change. Here, I did what was right under the circumstances."

He said, "But the report was incredible."

I said, "I know that it was incredible, but I couldn't completely ignore it. Here's a guy coming in and saying that he has absolutely clear intelligence, reliable from a wholly reliable source, that we were about to be shelled. I couldn't ignore that, not completely. I could discount it, but I couldn't ignore it."

That's the way I felt, anyway. And I'm sure that if I had gotten somebody killed, ignoring such a report, that I would have been drawn and quartered. My punishment would not have ended in a chewing out from John Kelly. I would have been railroaded out of the Foreign Service. Moreover, this would have been perfectly justified.

Q: You mentioned that you picked up one hostage in West Beirut. How did that come about?

MCNAMARA: At the time, things were still in turmoil in West Beirut when we got word that a hostage had been released. He'd been left on the doorstep of our old embassy in West Beirut. We still had a Lebanese guard force over there, keeping the embassy intact. I told Kelly I thought that I should go over and pick him up. I suggested forming a convoy to make a quick run into the West and return. Kelly said he wanted to go himself. I advised against it. Rather, insisting that he would be needed to control things from the embassy. I was more expendable. We couldn't risk losing the ambassador in doing something like this, but we could risk the DCM. It was more important that he be at the center, to control things if anything went wrong. He finally agreed. Kelly is no coward; he didn't stay because of any fear for his personal safety.

Q: No, it makes absolute sense. You just couldn't put the ambassador in something like that. That's showboating

MCNAMARA: That's right, that's all it would have been. You could, under the circumstances, risk the DCM, but you couldn't risk the ambassador. You had to have somebody of some stature there, somebody who understood what was going on and the consequences, but not the ambassador. So, anyway, that's what we did.

We put together a convoy of half a dozen vehicles, armed to the teeth, and we went over to this old embassy. Jacobsen was there with our Lebanese guards. I picked him up, put him in the car, and brought him back. That's all there was to it. Thank God for our Druze guards over there.

I guess this isn't any great violation of security anymore. At this period, the Delta Force was trying to work up a hostage rescue operation. They developed information that they thought was reliable, that the hostages were located in an old underground garage in West Beirut. They had taken pictures of the building. As it was put to me, they said they were 85 percent sure that that's where the hostages were being held. Information was being developed by both the CIA and other military intelligence sources. Thank God, the 85 percent just wasn't good enough to go on. The CIA station chief had reservations, and I certainly had some. Kelly shared our misgivings. We just could not afford another attempted rescue fiasco.

When Jacobsen was released, I asked him where he was held?

He was certain the location was near the airport in southern Beirut.

Now the airport is miles away from the place where our intelligence operators thought that the hostages were being held.

Jacobsen said, "I know it was near the airport, because I could hear the airplanes taking off and landing. And I heard the sound of waves hitting a beach."

Thus, he reckoned that he was near the beach and near the end of the runway of the airport. Thank God we did not act on the intelligence reports.

I am convinced that we were being purposely misled, fed misinformation, set up. Our rescuers might well have walked into a bloody ambush.

Jacobsen's debriefing ended planning for that operation.

Jacobsen was a funny guy. When we were coming out of West Beirut he asked, "Give me a gun, and we'll go down and get those bastards right now!"

We were still in West Beirut, and I said, "No, no, we're getting out of here. Out we go." Anyway I got him out.

Q: Was Kelly still ambassador when you left?

MCNAMARA: He was still ambassador, yes.

When I came back to Washington, after having been DCM and chargé d'affaires for two years in Lebanon, I didn't get to talk to anybody. April, the country director, never had time to talk to me. Dick Murphy didn't show any interest at all. Nobody.

Q: This wasn't as though you were getting the freeze; this is the sort of thing that happens too often in the Foreign Service.

MCNAMARA: Well, in that kind of situation, I think it was the freeze. And I think it was really stupid, under the circumstances. Jesus Christ, whether you think the guy has any sense or not, you ought to at least talk to someone who has just spent two years in a place like that. Just have the courtesy of talking to him. Besides, you just might learn something.

Q: It's incredible.

MCNAMARA: Well, I found it incredible.

Finally, I saw April in the hallway, and she said, "You know, you really ought to go home and take it easy. Go on vacation." That was that. And that was only by chance.

A friend of mine, who was an Arabist and who was in Lebanon with me, had known April for a very long time. He made a comment to me long before I had any problems with her and long before she went to Iraq. None of this has anything to do with Iraq; I don't know anything about that imbroglio.

Q: April Glaspie became a cause cēlībre in Iraq for the feeling that she had not done well with Iraq in the Kuwait War.

MCNAMARA: At the beginning. According to the newspapers, which is all I know about it, she'd been warned by Saddam Hussein that he might take military action if such and such wasn't done. And she went off on vacation the next day.

Q: But your friend had warned you about April Glaspie.

MCNAMARA: Oh, yeah, he described her as someone who would make a superb number two in the Political Section in Cairo, but that she really shouldn't ever be put in charge of anything. Her judgement was too flawed. She had great knowledge, but no judgement. This description was borne out by my dealings with her. She was unpredictable, erratic, emotional, arrogant and overconfident. In short, she was a bomb waiting for the right circumstance to explode.

Q: You came back when?

MCNAMARA: About August 1987.

Q: Were there any intimations about what you'd be doing?

MCNAMARA: No, I found my own assignment. I wanted to finish a book that I'd started in Stanford, so I made an arrangement to go to the National Defense University as a fellow, to finish the book. And that was it. I was not offered any other attractive alternatives. Kelly wrote a nice letter to the Director General, saying that I ought to be considered for another ambassadorship. But there were no assignments in the offing. Now I probably could have gotten a reasonably good assignment if I had pressed the assignments people.

Q: Well, the system is not designed to reward somebody for serving under difficult times.

MCNAMARA: No.

Q: It's a funny system.

MCNAMARA: It's a very funny system. Obviously, those are the people who should be taken care of in terms of onward assignments, but it often doesn't happen.

Q: Explain the book that you wrote at the National Defense University, what it was about. I think you mentioned it, somewhat, before. And then we'll go to your last assignment.

MCNAMARA: I started it in Stanford, at the Hoover Institution, after I left Gabon.

I did it at the suggestion of a noted scholar named Peter Durgnan, who is a friend of mine. Peter was the director of International Studies in 1984. He suggested to me that there was a gap in the literature, that nothing really serious had been written in English on France's relations with her former colonies in Africa, after independence in 1960. This gap, he said, ought to be filled. I was well equipped to do so. Peter suggested I had long served in Francophone Africa, spoke French, and had an interest in history.

So, when I finished my tour in Gabon in 1984, I spoke to Peter. He offered me a fellowship at Hoover if I could arrange things with the State Department. No objections were posed by the Department. They let me have a year as a Foreign Affairs Fellow. It was a great experience. Hoover gave me all the facilities-an office, telephone, and secretarial help when I needed it. The State Department paid my salary.

Q: But then, when you got out of Beirut...

MCNAMARA: I had done all the preliminary research in Stanford. The libraries there are really superb, with probably the best-organized African collection in the country.

When I got out of Beirut, I had most of the basic research done, I had chapters written, but the book wasn't in publishable form. I left it in this country when I went to Beirut, because I was afraid I might lose it. I'd lost everything in Vietnam, and I didn't want to lose a year's work by taking it to Beirut and having something happen.

Anyway, no interesting jobs were being offered to me, and I wanted to finish the book, so I got in touch with the people in the Department. They came up with two possibilities: one was the National Defense University; another was FSI. FSI had a program for people who wanted to do books. I can't remember what they called it now.

Q: Center for Studies or something.

MCNAMARA: Something like that. Anyway, they'd give you a year and some limited facilities. I talked to people at both the National Defense University and at FSI. I concluded that the National Defense University was likely to give me more in terms of support than FSI was. Also, Ft. McNair is a pleasant place to spend a year or two. FSI, at that time, was in Arlington, and it wasn't all that pleasant. So I opted for Ft. McNair. In addition to support, they also gave me money for a trip to France and to Africa.

The first year I was there I went on a long trip. I was in Paris twice, and I visited about seven or eight countries in Francophone Africa. I interviewed all sorts of people, especially in Paris. Jacques Focard, De Gaulle's *1/2*minence grise, was then in Prime Minister Chirac's office. He never gave interviews. Surprisingly, he did agree to talk to me. And I got to talk to loads of other people in Paris about French attitudes towards Africa, French policies, French activities, et cetera. Then, I went to Africa, visiting countries I'd never been to, talking a wide variety of people. This trip, in itself, was worth going to the National Defense University. It helped me fill in many gaps in my own knowledge, brought the book up to date, and inserted things that brought it alive-interviews with people who were actually active in some of the events I described.

Anyway, I went back to work on the draft, finished the last couple of chapters, which brought the book up to date. I also did lots of editing, rewrote chapters and I had a clean draft finished by the end of my first academic year there.

However, going to the Department and talking to the deputy assistant secretary for personnel, Bill Swing, there really weren't any assignments for me. He was very nice, but there was nothing coming down. So I opted to stay for another year. The National Defense University was willing to let me stay, and the Department didn't have anything interesting for me to do. It was a way of getting rid of me, getting rid of a problem. So, sure, you know, go ahead. I figured, the presidential elections were coming the next year, there would be some changes, whoever got elected, because Reagan couldn't run again. So I thought I'd be better off waiting at NDU until the next year, when better opportunities for an Ambassadorship were likely.

Q: You were basically pointing towards being an ambassador.

MCNAMARA: I didn't want to be anything else; I didn't want to do anything else. In any case, nothing else was offered that interested me. That's really all I wanted to be. And I was on a career extension, where you get three extra years. When I was in Beirut, they naturally gave me a career extension. They couldn't not give me one, under those circumstances. Under other circumstances, it is very difficult for senior officers to get a career extension.

Q: Before forced retirement.

MCNAMARA: There was forced retirement at that time under the Foreign Service Act of 1980. You got promoted to minister counselor, which was my rank. You then had five years to get promoted. At the end of five years, you either got a career extension, through a promotion board, or you got promoted to Career Minister. If neither happened, you were retired. When I was in Beirut, I got an extension, in about '86, which would have taken me up to '89. So, when I came out of Beirut, I still had two years to go before forced retirement.

Anyway, at the end of '88, I opted to stay at NDU rather than come back to the State Department.

The book was essentially finished, but the NDU press is very slow in publishing books. They get diverted to all kinds of things. So my book was finished and the draft was just sitting there on the editor's desk. They just weren't doing anything. Finally, I got the director, who was a very nice guy named Fred Kiley, to put the book out to a private editor, on contract. It never would have gotten published if I'd waited for the Civil Service editors. Finally, it was edited in that second year and published towards the end of 1989. The title is France in Black Africa.

Q: How did you get your last assignment?

MCNAMARA: My last assignment was as ambassador to Cape Verde. I went in December 1989 and retired in Cape Verde on December 31, 1992. I stayed for another week and came back in January of 1993.

As to how I got the job, well, George Bush won the election, as we all know. A new political team came to the State Department, with Baker as Secretary of State. A new assistant secretary for Africa was appointed, Herman Cohen. And Bartholomew became an under secretary for security affairs. I went to see Cohen, when I heard he was named (I'd known him for many years), and told him that I was interested in getting another embassy in Africa, that I'd go anywhere, and that I spoke Portuguese and French well. He said, "Portuguese?"

And I said, "Yes."

And that interested him, because there weren't very many Africanists who spoke Portuguese. Lots of them speak French, but not too many speak Portuguese. Not only that, but I'd just written a book about France in black Africa and had had more assignments in black Africa than anybody else in the Foreign Service at that point. I'd had seven assignments in black Africa. Still, the competition was keen for embassies, and I hadn't done the kinds of things in the Department that would encourage anybody to go out of his way to do anything for me. I may have been to Beirut, but I hadn't been anybody's personal assistant.

Q: Hadn't been a desk officer.

MCNAMARA: No, I hadn't hung around the African Bureau, doing bureaucratic things, making the right kind of contacts, and doing the sort of internal bureaucratic politics that it takes to ingratiate yourself with people who are in a position to take care of you. I'd avoided service in the State Department as much as I possibly could. I was only there twice: once as a junior officer, with you, and then once as a deputy assistant secretary in public affairs. You don't make an awful lot of contacts and ingratiate yourself, with that amount of experience in the Department. And that's how you usually get to be an ambassador in the Foreign Service.

Anyway, I would have expected that I'd get an embassy in Francophone Africa, given the fact that I had just published a book on the area and had several postings there. But that's okay, I didn't. Rather, Cohen gave me an assignment to Portuguese Africa. Okay, I could speak Portuguese, and that was fine. Bartholomew put in a good word for me. He had just been named an under secretary, and that counted for something. I was fortunate and got an embassy, albeit a very small one.

Q: What was the situation and American interest in Cape Verde at the time you went out there in 1989?

MCNAMARA: The country was governed by a moderate Marxist government. Authoritarian, but not oppressive. There were no political prisoners, for instance, or anything of that sort, but it was authoritarian. They had never had a contested election. The party was put in power by the radical young officers who had mounted a coup d'etat in Portugal. There was never a revolution against the Portuguese colonialism in Cape Verde itself. Whatever fighting was done took place in Guinea-Bissau, where there was a real war. But less than a hundred Cape Verdeans took part in that. In fact, they supplied the political leadership for the movement. The Bissauans were the foot soldiers.

Q: Now Guinea-Bissau was part of Cape Verde?

MCNAMARA: No, they came to independence together, as one country, Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau. But then in 1980, the Bissauans revolted against the Cape Verdean domination of the government. They chunked the Cape Verdeans out and took over control themselves in Guinea-Bissau, without killing anybody. The Cape Verdeans went back to Cape Verde, and they set up an independent country there.

It had been run, up until this point, by the same small clique that had been in Bissau. Probably less than a hundred people from Cape Verde had been in Bissau and participated, in one way or another, in the war. Not all in combat. Some were poets, a few were soldiers. But that's all there were. And these are the guys who came back, took control of the country, and dominated it for those intervening fifteen-odd years.

The country was getting restless, however. Younger generations had grown up since independence in 1975. Things were happening in Eastern Europe: democracy was coming, the Berlin Wall fell, changes came in Russia, the Marxist regimes were beginning to be viewed as bankrupt, politically and intellectually. There was pressure for change taking place, within the ruling party as well as among the population.

Finally, rather than try to resist these pressures, the ruling cabal decided to hold democratic popular elections. I'm sure they never thought that they'd lose power. But the outcome of the election was that an opposition party, which was formed only six months before the elections were held, won an overwhelming majority in the National Assembly. Later, an independent defeated the long serving President.

Q: The elections were held when?

MCNAMARA: Nineteen ninety.

Q: This was when you were there, of course.

MCNAMARA: Oh, yes, yes. Oh, this all took place while I was there, yes. Fascinating time.

Anyway, this opposition was created and won the election with a majority of something like eighty percent.

Q: Good heavens.

MCNAMARA: The president, who was thought to be a revered figure, was also chunked out. Most of the ministers even lost their seats in parliament.

Anyway, the change came, and it was accepted by the ruling party. The opposition took over, and they're in control now.

American interests in Cape Verde are based largely on sentiment. There are large numbers of Cape Verdeans living in the U.S. Indeed, we have had a Cape Verdean colony in Massachusetts and Rhode Island since colonial days.

Q: It was whaling, wasn't it?

MCNAMARA: It started with whaling. The Yankee whalers stopped by the Cape Verde Islands on their way to the whaling grounds in the Pacific. They would pick up some extra seamen there, because they were much cheaper than employing American seamen. As a result, a colony of Cape Verdeans grew up in New England. They came back with the whalers, and they settled down. So, small colonies started in New Bedford and Providence and along the Massachusetts coast.

Q: Cape Cod, I know some people there.

MCNAMARA: Cape Cod, there's a small group. Then more came to work in the cranberry bogs. And then more came to work in the textile factories and in nineteenth century New England. Ultimately, a community of Cape Verdeans grew up that was at least double the population of Cape Verde itself, centered in New England, but now spread all over the United States. And, of course, it's difficult to say who's a Cape Verdean now, because some people are fourth and fifth generation. They have intermarried with other Americans. In fact, the Cape Verdean-Americans constitute the largest African community in the United States that still retains roots in its country of origin. Moreover, the Cape Verdeans vote.

Q: Because it was not associated with slavery.

MCNAMARA: It had nothing to do with slavery. These were regular immigrants who came to the United States. Cape Verde had been a center for the slave trade earlier on, but that's a different question. These were Cape Verdeans who had grown up in Cape Verde and were not taken as slaves, but were free men who came to the United States as immigrants.

Certainly, the sentimental tie is there. And it's not just a sentimental tie, but it's a political tie, because the congressional delegations from New England are very aware of the political potential of the Cape Verdean community. Many of them do vote. And people like Senator Pell from Rhode Island are conscious of the Cape Verdeans and very protective of their interests. In fact, before I went to Cape Verde, I went to see him, and he said to me, "You take care of those Cape Verdeans for me." He gave me my marching orders before I left.

Of course, we have lots of consular activities in Cape Verde. Every Cape Verdean has cousins, brothers, sisters, and sometimes mothers and fathers in the United States. There are loads of Cape Verdeans who live in Cape Verde but are American citizens. The connections are so intimate and so intertwined that the consular business is very big and complex. We have, therefore, a requirement to have a consul in Cape Verde, given all of the consular business that has to be transacted between the two countries.

The presence of so many Cape Verdeans in the U.S. is the principal reason we have an embassy in Praia.

Q: What was life like there?

MCNAMARA: Life was very pleasant, very pleasant indeed. The Cape Verdeans are among the nicest people in the world. They are an island people. Mixed blood. You can see Mendel's Law in operation. In the same family, you can encounter blonde, blue-eyed, Nordic types, and coal-black people. And you would find all of the shades in between. Most people are coffee colored, but they're every complexion. Some you could easily mistake for Europeans; others are definitely African type. Yet they all live in harmony. There aren't any open racial problems.

Differences, however, do exist between islands. But, of course, there are no tribal differences, because there are no tribes there.

The islands were uninhabited when the Portuguese arrived in the 15th century. They brought colonists from Portugal, and slaves from Africa. The two mixed, creating a Cape Verdean nation.

Q: When you were there, what was your prime concerns?

MCNAMARA: My prime concern, first, was the elections, of course, and the advent of popular democracy.

Then, after the elections, assisting the Cape Verdeans in a movement towards liberal economics, the privatization of the economy.

Of course, aid, because Cape Verde is completely dependent on foreign aid. Foreign aid and remittances from overseas Cape Verdeans are the two big sources of income for Cape Verde.

They have long droughts, and the country is extremely poor as a result. Agriculture is a very uncertain thing. And they have little else. There are no known mineral resources. It's a very poor country. That's, of course, one of the reasons why so many have migrated.

Anyway, I was focused, number one, on assuring that the aid program continued and was well focused, and, number two, on assisting the Cape Verdeans with their plans to privatize the economy.

To do this, I suggested to the minister of finance that the key would be getting the World Bank involved. I said, "A way of doing that is for us to do some preliminary studies, which we can finance through our USAID program. These then can be used by people in the World Bank to bring on a World Bank program. But they can't finance the preliminary studies." I worked out a strategy for them, and the minister seized it like a drowning man takes a life buoy.

Q: This was the president?

MCNAMARA: No, the finance minister. He's the sort of economic czar. He's an economist and the prime minister's brother.

Q: This was the new regime?

MCNAMARA: This was the new regime, yes.

Under the old regime, I was focused mainly on the elections, the path towards democracy. A new regime, this was really pretty exciting. Now they had a chance to really change what was going on, have a systemic change.

Anyway, the finance minister seized my suggestion like a man who is drowning and grabs a life buoy.

And that's what happened. We did preliminary studies for them which were used to encourage the entry of the World Bank. The World Bank came in, in a big way.

The World Bank needed a successful model in Africa, and so they seized on Cape Verde as a place where they had good perspectives. Cape Verde was a democracy by this time. There was virtually no corruption in the government. People were keen on privatization and liberalizing the economy, and were willing to accept the Bank's suggestions. They had promising human resources, with fairly sophisticated responsible people at the top of the government. The Bank has been very generous in their aid. And not only that, but they've mobilized other donors. So a whole program has been worked out for the modernization and liberalization of the economy, with aid from a variety of donors.

Q: Where is this aid going to go? What are they going to end up with?

MCNAMARA: Hopefully, they'll wind up with a self-sustaining economy. Obviously, this is not certain, given their lack of resources, but it's certainly worth a try. If it happens, it'll be based on fisheries, tourism, secondary industry, and maybe a free port.

The secondary industry is perhaps the chanciest. This would be in conjunction with a free port, of course.

But they've already gotten some textile mills coming in from China. The Cape Verdeans, under the Lomé Treaty, have access to the European Common Market at preferential levels of tariff. They also have access to the American market, under some regulation or other. The Chinese, of course, don't have this, and so some Chinese textile people came from Hong Kong and mainland China and set up textile factories. They don't make the textiles there. They cut and sew them together, do the fabrication of garments, and then export them. That's something that's happened within the last year, since I've been gone. It was in the mill before that, but it's now actually happened. Hopefully, they'll get some more of these small industries to come in.

I started a coast guard to protect their fisheries, because other people were coming in to exploit their fishing resources, legally and illegally. The Cape Verdeans needed to protect them and to exploit them themselves. So, with the help of the U.S. Coast Guard, I got a little coast guard started. We got a boat, through the Biodiversity Fund. It's a USAID fund that was set up for biodiversity, but I justified a patrol boat out of it. So, anyway, they've got a coast guard started.

They have some people interested in setting up a fishing industry there, so, hopefully, that'll go, too.

As for tourism, it's the best windsurfing in the world there. A lot of people come just for the windsurfing. And if it becomes better known, hopefully more people will come. It's great sailing; there's always a good wind. You don't have a lot of heavy storms, but you always have a good, brisk wind, so it's very good for sailing.

Q: Going back to the election. What were your relations with the Marxist government? They were surprised by the results of the election. How were you seeing it as they went into it?

MCNAMARA: I was convinced that they were going to lose. I predicted they were going to lose the election, six months before the election was held. Oftentimes, politicians delude themselves (and not just Cape Verde politicians). Also, political leaders that have been in uncontested power for long periods oftentimes surround themselves with sycophants. They hear and are told only things they want to hear. They hear selectively, and, of course, also, they choose to surround themselves with people who are only going to tell them what they want to hear.

My relations with the old government's leaders were very good. I had close relations with the president, who also came and saw Bush several times. He's really a fine old man. He wanted to introduce genuine democracy in the country.

The prime minister was more of a dedicated Marxist. His name is Pedro Pires, a very bright guy. My relations with him were good; they were amicable. He knew that he had to deal with the world as it is, and that America was the only great power at this point, and that he needed our aid and also our goodwill. He also realized that America was by far the most popular foreign country in Cape Verde, because of all the connections, and that it was very important for him, politically, to be seen to have good relations with the American ambassador. So he used to take me around with him sometimes on some of his trips.

Q: How about the relations with the Portuguese there?

MCNAMARA: There was a good deal of ambivalence towards the Portuguese, especially by the former government, led by people who had actually fought against the Portuguese.

The new government, however, was much less ambivalent, much more welcoming of the Portuguese, much closer to the Portuguese.

I'm sure, in my own mind, that, at the time of independence, if they'd actually had a free election, a majority of the Cape Verdeans might well have voted to stay with Portugal as a quasi-independent province, as, for instance, Madeira or the Azores are. But they weren't given that choice. The young officers who controlled things in Portugal at that time decided, at the insistence of these Cape Verdeans who were involved in the war and the settlement of the war in Guinea-Bissau, that Cape Verde should be granted independence. The small band of former freedom fighters came over from Guinea-Bissau and were given control by the radical young officers who were in charge in Portugal.

Well, anyway, I saw the elections clearly going to be won by the opposition.

My relations remained amicable with the previous government right through the elections and right up to the day I left. I went to see the former prime minister, who was then leader of the opposition (one of the last people I saw), and said goodbye to him. It was sort of a sad occasion, because he was still in trauma from the loss of the election. I also paid a call on the former president. He's retired now and is viewed as a sort of grand old man in Africa, and floats around Africa and gives words of wisdom and advice to others. I saw him not long before I left, too. Some of the previous ministers are still among my best friends there. In fact, there's one here now, the previous minister of education. I got a grant for him to study here on a Humphrey scholarship. He's on it now. He just came to see me about a week ago here in Washington. He's at the University of Minnesota. He will go back, and some day he may well be president or prime minister. Probably will be.

Q: Well, is there anything else?

MCNAMARA: As for the quality of life in Cape Verde, we had one of the smallest, most modest residences in the Foreign Service. A nice little Portuguese colonial house. Certainly nothing very grand or ostentatious. Very small, with a very small living room. It was very difficult to entertain.

When we had 4th of July parties, we used to invite four and five hundred people, because the American connection is a big thing for the Cape Verdeans. Our relations are very important to them. Also, my wife is a great cook. So we would take all the furniture out of the first floor of the house and open it, from the front gate to the back yard. Neither the front yard nor the back yard were more than postage stamps, but nonetheless, we'd just take all the furniture out and have a cocktail and then a big dinner, because they expected dinner. When you have a cocktail, it means dinner. And my wife would work for about a month producing enough food for about four-five hundred people. They'd come in and they'd clean the whole place up. It would be just as if we had invited vacuum cleaners.

Another interesting feature of service in Praia was the embassy's 32-foot motor-sailer. We went sailing all the time.

The diplomatic community was very small, only seven missions, plus a group of UN international-organization representatives. So there wasn't a great diplomatic life. But I got to know a lot of Cape Verdeans, and they would invite me to Cape Verdean cookouts and things up in the mountains or in their houses.

They loved music, and they'd always play music and sing. You'd sit around for hours drinking "Grog" (rum) and listening to great Cape Verdean music.

The traditional music is the morna, sad songs of farewell as people were migrating. These are a migrant people. Being of Irish origins, I understand this, because the Irish did the same thing. These were very sentimental songs that they would be singing on the eve of departure. In the 19th century, obviously, and even early 20th century, leaving was for good. They probably were never coming back. These songs were sung as people were going off, perhaps forever. They were very sad, but very sentimental and very warm. Sad and warm.

Well, they also have more modern music. They have something called the funana, which is a song and a dance. The dance was outlawed by the Portuguese when they were there, because they said it was virtual copulation to music. And it is. I mean, it's really, really close. There's an awful lot of gyrating.

Q: You're moving your hands up and down.

MCNAMARA: It's not so much hands, it's bodies. It's a body massage. Anyway, it's now, of course, widely accepted, and anybody who tried to stop it would have a revolution on his hands.

Anyway, there's just great music and great fun.

For instance, a pal of mine, who had a big, extended family, would have a cookout every Sunday at a house in the mountains. You arrived at about one o'clock in the afternoon. It would go on, if you stayed, until maybe one o'clock that night. Loads of food, lots to drink, and lots of music and dancing. He was pretty well-to-do; he had a building contract business. His brother became a minister in the new government-the minister of public works. Both of them had university degrees from the United States, Northeastern University, in Boston. So they'd put on these great parties. And people would come, all kinds of people. They just sort of dropped in and dropped out. It was just great fun.

Q: After a career of sitting around in Beirut and Vietnam and Elisabethville, you deserved it.

MCNAMARA: Oh, yes, it was really a nice place to have a twilight tour. My relations with Cape Verdeans are still strong and warm.

The minister of finance was just here for the IMF meeting, and he called me up and asked me to come to a lunch with him. We had lunch together. He asked me for my advice on this and that. They're worried that the USAID mission might be withdrawn and that aid could eventually be cut. In any case, he's worried about the symbolism of the American USAID mission going, and its effect on other countries' aid, not just ours. Ours, in terms of the amount of the finance, isn't all that great. I asked him if he'd been to see anybody in Congress, and he said, yes, he'd gone to see a couple of congressmen. I asked him if he'd seen any senators, and he said, no, he hadn't, his embassy didn't suggest it. And I said, "Well, it's very important. Has anybody done anything about mobilizing the community, getting them to write letters and call congressmen?"

And he said, "No, I was told that it wasn't the right time."

I said, "Look, in American politics, there's no wrong time. You always want to keep those lines with congressmen open. You can't have too much influence. It's not possible. You want to remind them that they've got a lot of votes who are Cape Verdeans. So anything that comes up with Cape Verde, they're interested in it. And they have a direct interest, because they've got guys who vote for them, or don't vote for them, on that basis. This is the way it works in American politics. It's not just the Jewish population in this country that mobilizes in support of Israel. The Greeks have done it over Cyprus. The Greeks really mobilized an awful lot of action with Congress. And congressmen paid attention."

He asked, "Well, what can you do for us?"

I said, "I'll go and see the four senators, because you do not have time to do it, and the ambassador hasn't done it."

He asked me if I would do it, and so I saw Pell, who is the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee and the senator from Rhode Island. Pell, before I went to Cape Verde, had told me to take care of those Cape Verdeans. So I reminded him of all that, and told him it was his turn to take care of those Cape Verdeans. He said he would. And I wrote a letter for him to send to the AID administrator. I saw Kerry, from Massachusetts, and Chaffee, the other senator from Rhode Island, and Senator Ted Kennedy. I saw their staff; I didn't see them. And one staffer on the Foreign Relations Committee is trying to get me in to see Simons, who is the chairman of the Subcommittee on Africa.

So I've done all that for them, and I told him, "Now you've got to mobilize." I called him the other day to tell him what I had done, and warn him that staffers told me, "Look, we never hear from the Cape Verdeans. We know there are Cape Verdeans in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. They never write to us; they never say anything. Jesus Christ, you've got to get these guys to make their presence known and write to these congressmen." One girl in Kennedy's office said, "Look, if a congressman gets four or five hundred postcards, calls, letters, anything, he'll do flips. This will really get action." So, anyway, I told the minister this, and he said he'd work on it right away, tomorrow.

But, anyway, it was a fun place.

Q: Well, Terry, it's been a long trip we've done on this. I want to thank you very much.

MCNAMARA: Well, thank you, Stu.

End of interview